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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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"THIS LAND IS OURS!"
THE SHAPING OF XHOSA RESISTANCE TO EUROPEAN EXPANSION
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By

Robert S. Ehlers, Jr.

December 1992

Chairman: R. Hunt Davis, Jr.
Major Department: History

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With few exceptions, scholars of South African history have treated major wars between Xhosa and Europeans as defining moments in their relationship. This tendency to focus on warfare between the races has obscured the important conflicts that were constantly occurring among the Xhosa themselves, as well as the fact that significant peaceful interaction occurred between Xhosa and European. Much of the existing literature also holds that the extreme hostility characteristic of later Xhosa-European relations was the rule from the earliest days of contact.

In contrast to such work, this thesis will demonstrate that Xhosa perceptions of the European threat developed gradually. Thus, a long window of analysis, encompassing the period from 1770 to 1820, is necessary in order fully to understand the manner in which conflict among the Xhosa chiefdoms on the one hand and the relationships that those polities maintained with the Cape Colony on the other interacted to shape Xhosa attitudes towards whites.

This study addresses three distinct periods in the history of the Cape's Eastern Frontier. The first, covering the period before 1770, provides necessary background such as early Xhosa history and the physical geography of the region in which black and white made contact. The second period, running from 1770 to 1811, details early Xhosa-European interaction and the ways in which it influenced, and was influenced by, internal conflict among the Xhosa chiefdoms. The third and critical period covers the decade from 1811 to 1820, during which Xhosa attitudes towards whites underwent significant change. A complex interaction between internal and external stresses led during this decade to the most violent conflicts in Xhosa history, as well as to a clear idea among all the chiefdoms of the danger posed by the Cape Colony.

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By
ROBERT S. EHLERS, JR.

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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1992

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

- ABCO Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines,
 Parliamentary Paper 538 of 1836
- CTG/AA Cape Town Gazette, and African Advertiser
- PP50 Papers relative to the condition and treatment of
 the native inhabitants of Southern Africa,
 Parliamentary Paper 50 of 1835
- PP252 Further papers relative to the condition and
 treatment of the native inhabitants of South-
 ern Africa, Parliamentary Paper 252 of 1835
- RCC George M. Theal, ed., Records of the Cape
 Colony, 35 vols. (London: Clowes and
 Sons, 1897-1905)

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characteristic of later Xhosa-European relations was the rule from the earliest days of contact.

In contrast to such work, this thesis will demonstrate that Xhosa perceptions of the European threat developed gradually. Thus, a long window of analysis, encompassing the period from 1770 to 1820, is necessary in order fully to understand the manner in which conflict among the Xhosa chiefdoms on the one hand and the relationships that those polities maintained with the Cape Colony on the other interacted to shape Xhosa attitudes towards whites.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Major Themes

The object of this thesis is to examine how and to what degree conflicts among the Xhosa chiefdoms interacted with European encroachment after 1770 to produce a growing awareness among the Xhosa polities that whites, and not other Africans, posed the most serious threat to their political and cultural autonomy. Further, it demonstrates the ways in which the Xhosa, initially divided into several competing chiefdoms, gradually attained a large measure of political unity in response to increasing European influence over their internal affairs. This work focuses on the period from 1770 to 1820, tracing the complex relationships that existed among the various Xhosa chiefdoms and the manner in which those relations were impacted by the European presence. It demonstrates that attitudes towards whites evolved gradually and at different times depending upon when European actions threatened the political or economic autonomy of individual Xhosa polities.

Important here is the realization that relationships along the Cape Colony's Eastern Frontier were not always defined in terms of race, particularly before the second

period of British rule beginning in 1806. Any attempt to use racial difference as the only determinant of early frontier relations would obscure the fact that important conflicts frequently occurred not only between Xhosa and Europeans, but also among the Xhosa polities themselves. Such a single-factor analysis would also tend to hide the fact that military and economic cooperation between black and white were common before 1806. This is not to say that relationships between the races were harmonious, or that their political and economic objectives were complementary. It is, however, important to note that early interaction on the Eastern Frontier often transcended racial lines.

Further, this work argues that it is impossible to view any single event or action as the defining moment in the shaping of Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans. Major frontier wars have often been characterized as critical events that defined relations between Xhosa chiefdoms and whites. It will be argued that although warfare certainly helped to shape attitudes towards whites, it was by no means the only important factor. Colonial economic policies also played a role, as did direct British political involvement in the affairs of individual chiefdoms after 1806. The thesis, therefore, demonstrates that Xhosa attitudes towards whites developed as the result of a long and complex process that began in 1770, the results of which were clearly discernable only after 1820.

Key Questions and Organization

This work fulfills its stated purpose by addressing several specific questions that have remained largely unanswered in the existing historiography. How, for example, did the changing nature of the frontier affect Xhosa perceptions of Europeans? How did interaction with whites alter the nature of relationships among the chiefdoms, and how in turn did these changing relations affect perceptions of the threat posed by Europeans? During what period did the majority of Xhosa come to view the Cape Colony as posing a serious danger to their political and cultural autonomy? This last question starts from the assertion, made in chapter three, that the various Xhosa chiefs initially viewed one another, and not whites, as the greatest danger to their control over cattle, land and followers -- in other words, to the underpinnings of their authority.

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to focus in detail upon three major periods in the history of Xhosa-European interaction. Chapter two provides a brief look at the importance of the frontier zone's geography in determining settlement patterns and competition for resources. More importantly, it sets the stage for the following chapter with an introduction to the dynamics of Xhosa internal politics prior to contact with the trekboers. In particular, it addresses relationships between chiefs and commoners, and the ways in which they were influenced by

cattle and land. This relates directly to the question of political sovereignty as defined later in this introduction.

Chapter three is concerned with the complexities of interaction along the frontier in the period from 1770 to 1811, stressing that white settlers in this early period, few in number and without the backing of a powerful government, were incapable of achieving dominance over their African neighbors. It also emphasizes the fact that Boer social and economic organization were in several respects similar to those of the Xhosa, lessening the cultural divide between the two peoples but also creating competition for cattle and land, the resources upon which both societies depended for survival. The key point made in this chapter follows directly: despite increasing competition for resources and brutal attacks by Boer commandos, the majority of chiefs and commoners continued during this early period to see their white neighbors as a secondary concern and instead remained focused upon the threat posed by competing chiefdoms. Important here was the inability of the Dutch East India Company, the first British administration, or the Batavian Republic to assert their authority over the frontier regions of the Cape Colony.

Chapter four is the central one of the thesis. Dealing with the decade from 1811 to 1820, it traces the impact that warfare, colonial policies and competition among the various chiefdoms had on Xhosa perceptions of the danger posed by

the Cape Colony. An analysis of the interaction between these three factors provides a clear view of the profound changes that occurred in Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans. Central here is the nature of British rule. Unlike either the Dutch East India Company or the Batavian Republic, England had the will and the resources to achieve supremacy in the frontier zone. It will become clear that the second period of British rule at the Cape, beginning in 1806, was the first point at which a truly colonial presence existed along the Cape's Eastern Frontier. The policies of Britain's Cape governors and the rivalry between Ngqika and Ndlambe -- the period's most powerful Xhosa chiefs -- form the axes around which this decade's key events revolve.

Chapter five provides a brief conclusion that looks at events from 1820 to 1835, building upon arguments made in the previous chapter. A summary of the key points made during the work, particularly with respect to processes affecting the development of Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans, is also presented.

Weaknesses in the Existing Historiography

With few exceptions, scholars of South African history have tended to treat major armed conflicts between Xhosa and Europeans as defining moments in frontier relations. Some, such as John Alan Hopper, have pointed to the first three frontier wars fought between the Xhosa and Dutch-speaking

settlers in the late eighteenth century.¹ Others, including J. B. Peires and John Milton, have singled out the Fourth Frontier War (1811-12). This was the first conflict in which large numbers of British troops were employed, marking the point at which the military balance began to shift in favor of the Europeans.² While these were important events in the shaping of Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans, they are by no means the only useful tools of analysis in the study of relations on the Cape's Eastern Frontier. This tendency to focus on warfare between black and white has obscured the important conflicts that were constantly occurring among the Xhosa themselves. Divided as they were into several autonomous chiefdoms, the Xhosa were often in conflict with one another. Most historians have missed the significance of this internal competition. In particular, they have failed to address the manner in which these disputes among the chiefdoms interacted with Xhosa-European relations; how, in other words, the synthesis of internal and external relationships helped to shape Xhosa attitudes towards the whites.

An equally serious and related problem with much of the literature has been the tendency to define relations on the

¹ John Alan Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations, 1770-1803" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1980).

² J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); John Milton, The Edges of War (Cape Town: Juta and Co., 1983).

Eastern Frontier along strictly racial lines. This has conveyed the impression that conflict between Africans and Europeans was the central unit of analysis in the study of the frontier and that peaceful interaction was somehow rare or absent. George M. Theal's History of South Africa epitomizes this genre.³ Despite Theal's own claim that his history is a "true and unbiased narrative," it is evident that his construction of the Cape Frontier's history along racial lines had an ulterior motive. Theal, as it turns out, believed that whites had a responsibility to "civilize" Africans, who were, in his estimation, "fickle barbarians prone to robbery and unscrupulous in shedding blood."⁴ Further, Theal believed that "the African, whose ancestors through all time had been accustomed to see the strong despise and trample upon the weak, felt no degradation in serving the white man, whom he instinctively recognized as his superior."⁵

Viewed in this light, it is easy to understand why Theal wrote his history strictly along racial lines. To Theal, frontier relations became a contest between "civilization" and "barbarism," with the two extremes represented,

³ George McCall Theal, History of South Africa, 11 vols. (London: Sonnenschein, 1897, and London: Allen and Unwin, 1915; reprint, Cape Town: Struik, 1964).

⁴ Theal, History, 6:121.

⁵ George M. Theal, Progress of South Africa in the Nineteenth Century (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1902), 183.

predictably, by whites and blacks. Christopher Saunders effectively characterizes the distortions in Theal's writings when he says that

Theal, the pioneer, the founder of South African historiography, did more than anyone else to establish a tradition of strongly pro-colonist, anti-black historical writing, and to create the racist paradigm which lay at the heart of that tradition and which served to justify white rule.⁶

Recent historiography has gone some distance towards alleviating this imbalance. Monica Wilson was the first to break through the racial dichotomies that had previously barred any effective study of Xhosa history. Her work in the Oxford History of South Africa demonstrates that conflict and cooperation on the frontier transcended racial lines.⁷ Similarly, Martin Legassick effectively argues that race was by no means the only determinant of hostility on the Eastern Frontier.⁸ Leonard Thompson and Hermann Giliomee have contributed greatly to our understanding of the complex interactions in the frontier zone.⁹ The works

⁶ Christopher Saunders, The Making of the South African Past (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 29.

⁷ Monica Wilson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier," in The Oxford History of South Africa, ed. Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, 2 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1969).

⁸ Martin Legassick, "The Frontier Tradition in South African Historiography," in Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, ed. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (London: Longman, 1980).

⁹ Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, "Comparative Frontier History;" and Hermann Giliomee, "Processes in Development of the Southern African Frontier, in The Frontier

of Jeff Peires and John Alan Hopper have also gone far beyond earlier scholarship in analyzing the complexities of Xhosa-European interaction, demonstrating clearly that cooperation between the chiefdoms and settler communities were by no means uncommon, particularly in the first forty years of continuous contact. They further demonstrate that, during this early period, Xhosa polities remained more concerned about the threat posed by competing chiefdoms than they were about conflict with the Europeans.¹⁰ These two central points have contributed significantly to our understanding of Xhosa history.

Nevertheless, weaknesses remain even in the most recent historiography. Hopper's work on early interactions between Xhosa and Dutch-speaking settlers is effective as far as it goes, but ends prior to the decade from 1811 to 1820, which this thesis holds to be the critical period during which virtually all of the Xhosa chiefdoms became aware of the threat posed by the European presence. Peires has written the best general history of the Xhosa people, but his analysis of the decade from 1811 to 1820 is weak in several respects. Like many other scholars, he places too much

in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared, ed. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Hermann Giliomee, "The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812" in The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ See notes 1 and 2 above.

emphasis on the 1811-12 war, and his treatment of events on the frontier in the eight years following that conflict is cursory. Further, he fails adequately to address several important internal developments among and external stresses upon the Xhosa polities that were absolutely central in convincing them that the Cape Colony posed the greatest danger to their political and cultural autonomy.

Finally, with reference to previous works on the Xhosa, it is important to note that few, if any, have treated the evolution of Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans as a gradual process that occurred during different periods and at varying tempos depending upon the particular Xhosa chiefdoms involved. Most scholars have instead held that the extreme hostility characteristic of later Xhosa-European relations was actually the rule from the earliest days of contact.

The Nature of the Sources

A few points also need to be made about the sources used for this work. The Xhosa were a nonliterate people until missionaries began to instruct the first converts in reading and writing during the early 1800s. For this reason, no written sources were produced by Xhosa during the period from 1770 to 1820. Thus, it has been necessary to rely heavily on sources produced by Europeans. The limitations of such sources, and the dangers involved in using them, are clear. Nonetheless, many accounts from the period record statements made by Xhosa, and these quotes are useful

in lending an African voice to the narrative, despite the many pitfalls associated with using such second-hand testimony. Further, correspondence between government officials, once confidential but now available to the public, provides insights on the thought processes that drove colonial policies towards the Xhosa.

A few historical works have been written by Xhosa, but none were undertaken before the 1880s. Further, those Xhosa who did write about their history, such as John Henderson Soga, were generally Christian and extensively "colonized" from a cultural perspective.¹¹ Nevertheless, these authors were able to record a surprising amount of information about early Xhosa history. One needs, however, to consider the degree to which the information in such works has been influenced by the passage of time, as well as by the impact of Christianity and European rule.

Fortunately, more recent historiography has included sources such as oral tradition, historical geography and archaeology in tracing Xhosa history from its beginnings to the period of continuous contact with Europeans. Yet these sources take us only so far. The archaeological record is far from complete, while oral sources, as Peires expertly points out, are often severely distorted over time.¹²

¹¹ John H. Soga, The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1930); and The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs (Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1931).

¹² Peires, Phalo, 170-175.

This brings us once again to the importance of European sources. Travellers, government officials, missionaries and settlers all wrote about their experiences in the Colony. This material required careful evaluation prior to its use in the thesis. Yet it was possible to derive from these sources some idea of who the Xhosa were and how they responded to the European presence. Such research produced the evidence necessary to support this work's key points.

Issues of Sovereignty and Xhosa Identity

Two more issues of some importance must be addressed in order to allow for an effective reading of the ensuing chapters. First, it is necessary to understand how the polities referred to in this work as "Xhosa" expressed their political sovereignty. Although this question will be addressed at greater length in the following chapter, it is important to cover it now, if only briefly. Even a cursory review of the existing historiography makes it clear that the Xhosa chiefdoms lacked any sort of effective political unity.¹³ It is true that chiefs traced their lineage to Tshawe, the mythical founder of a unified Xhosa polity. However, political fragmentation and armed conflict among the heirs

¹³ J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 28-29, 45-63; John Alan Hopper, Xhosa-Colonial Relations, 1770-1803 (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1980), 12-19.

of Tshawe after 1715 undermined any feeling of political corporateness that might have existed before that time.¹⁴

Thus, in defining political sovereignty with respect to the Xhosa chiefdoms, it is important to begin with the understanding that they were politically independent of one another. Further, chiefs expressed their independence through the use of armed force against any outside group, "Xhosa" or otherwise, that threatened the underpinnings of their power. It is argued in the next chapter that cattle and land were the sources of chiefly power, because these commodities attracted commoners and therefore determined the size of a chief's following. Further, access to cattle and land ensured the physical sustenance as well as the economic and cultural autonomy of all the Xhosa, chiefs and commoners alike. Chiefs and their followers, therefore, sought to establish and maintain control over these resources, peacefully if possible but otherwise through the use of armed force. As a study of African political systems suggests,

in studying political organization, we have to deal with the maintenance or establishment of social order, within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force.¹⁵

The second concern deals with the difficulty of defining who "the Xhosa" were. It is clear that, by 1770 at

¹⁴ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 19-20.

¹⁵ M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, eds., African Political Systems (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), xiv.

least, political unity among the chiefdoms no longer existed. Although the chiefs acknowledged a paramount who acted as titular ruler of the Xhosa and had great political and spiritual prestige, this individual by no means controlled the political actions of the other heirs of Tshawe.¹⁶

However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that, despite political divisions, strong cultural ties existed among the chiefdoms. This makes it possible, at least in some sense, to talk about "the Xhosa." The people who comprised these competing chiefdoms spoke a common language and engaged in similar economic, social and spiritual practices.¹⁷ Also, the fact that every chief acknowledged the existence of a paramount leader indicates that a certain Xhosa identity did exist, even if only to a limited extent. As one study argues, "the social structure of a people stretches beyond their political system, so defined, for there are always social relations of one kind or another between peoples of different autonomous political groups."¹⁸

In this sense, the Xhosa should be seen as a people divided by political concerns, but united by strong cultural bonds. Thus, for the purposes of this work, the use of the

¹⁶ Peires, Phalo, 30-31; Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 19-20.

¹⁷ Peires, Phalo, 3-10; Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 25-27.

¹⁸ Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, African Political Systems, 23.

word "Xhosa" will be avoided whenever the chiefdoms can logically be addressed by their individual titles. However, in substantiating larger arguments about reactions to European encroachment, it has been both necessary and, I believe, proper to refer to "the Xhosa" collectively. These concepts of political sovereignty and "Xhosaness" are critical to an understanding of how relations among competing chiefdoms, and between the chiefdoms and Europeans, interacted to create a growing awareness of the threat posed by whites and ultimately a greater measure of political cooperation among the Xhosa polities.

The Khoikhoi Experience

Finally, one topic that this work will not address at length is the impact of European encroachment upon the Khoikhoi and San. Because this subject relates in several respects to the questions at hand, however, it is important to say a few words about it. From 1652 until approximately 1770, numerous Khoi polities had seen their lands and cattle taken by the trekboers, despite continuous and fierce resistance.¹⁹ By 1770, the last independent Khoi chiefdoms were destroyed as Boer and Xhosa groups migrated into the region between the Fish and Sundays Rivers. Surviving Khoi became Boer servants or were incorporated into the westernmost

¹⁹ Richard Elphick and V. C. Malherbe, "The Khoisan to 1828," in The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 3-42.

Xhosa chiefdoms.²⁰ This process is relevant to the current work in three respects. First, the destruction of Khoi independence and their use by the settlers as subordinate laborers is indicative of the attitudes that the trekboers had towards Africans. Boer settlers clearly believed that Africans were inferior and should fill subordinate economic positions within settler society.²¹ Second, the brutal campaigns waged by Boer commandos against both the Khoikhoi and the San foreshadowed the tactics that they used in attempting to subject the Xhosa chiefdoms to their will.²² Third, embittered Khoikhoi living amongst both the trekboers and the peripheral Xhosa polities attempted to rebuild their herds by raiding cattle from the parties responsible for the destruction of their political and economic autonomy. This led to friction on the frontier and ultimately to warfare between the minor Xhosa chiefdoms and the trekboers.²³ In this sense, the Khoikhoi experience acts not only as a prism through which to view trekboer interaction with the Xhosa chiefdoms; it also provides insights on the development of tensions along the frontier.

²⁰ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 427, 430-431.

²¹ Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee, "The Origins and Entrenchment of European Dominance at the Cape, 1652-c.1840," in The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 544-551.

²² Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 93.

²³ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 103-104.

CHAPTER 2
THE BACKGROUND: GEOGRAPHY, XHOSA SOCIETY
AND XHOSA HISTORY TO 1770

Physical Geography of the Frontier Zone

Geography played a central role in relations between Xhosa and European along the Cape Colony's Eastern Frontier. At its greatest extent, the territory occupied by the Xhosa stretched between the Sundays and Mbashe Rivers, or some 250 miles. The chiefdoms whose people were collectively referred to by their Khoikhoi neighbors as "Xhosa" inhabited the coastal strip that separates South Africa's highlands from the Indian Ocean. A region of temperate grasslands, it is well suited to stock farming and its soils support agriculture. Rainfall occurs mostly in the summer months between October and February.

Many rivers drain water from the highlands to the Indian Ocean, but the availability of water is highly variable throughout the region. So highly did the Xhosa prize water sources that the English official John Barrow, during his travels through the region at the end of the eighteenth century, was prompted to say that "water . . . is everything in Southern Africa."¹ His observation was particularly

¹ John Barrow, Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa, 2 vols, 2d ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1801), 1:35.

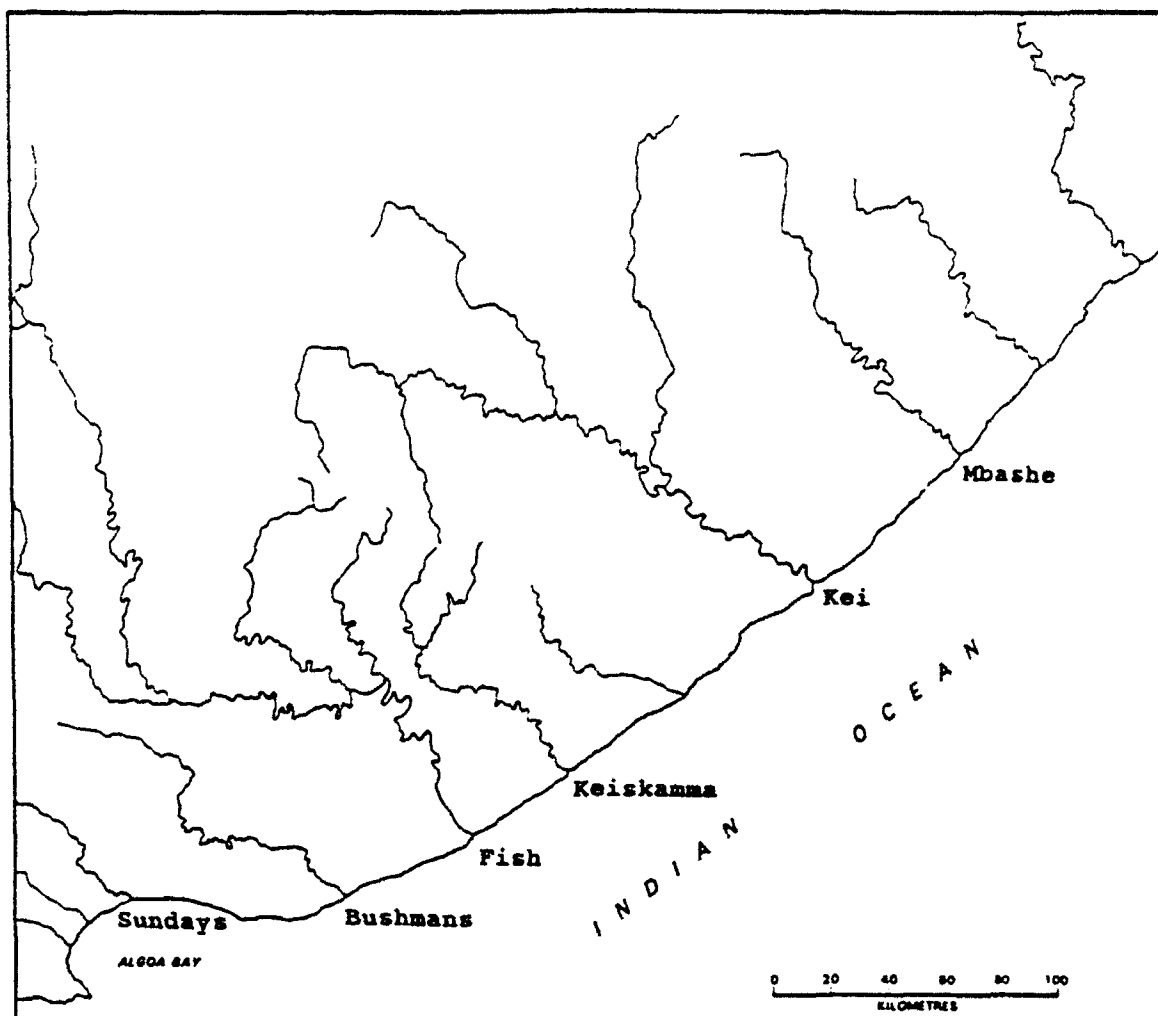


Figure 2-1. The Mbashe-Sundays Region.

Source: J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Map 3, 85.

relevant to the area between the Great Fish and Sundays Rivers, where the outlying Xhosa chiefdoms encountered eastward-moving trekboers during the 1770s. The ground between these two major rivers is not well watered. Lying between dry areas to the west, which receive less than 10 inches of rain a year, and a moist zone to the east, which often receives in excess of 30 inches, most of the area receives less than 20 inches of rain per year.² Moreover, the rains in this area are irregular, making the region susceptible to drought.³ This contrasts with areas east of the Fish River, which have higher rainfall, better soils and more mixed pasturage, composed of both sweet and sour veld.

Springs and rivers, which formed key areas of settlement for the Xhosa polities, are plentiful east of the Fish River but become uncommon to the west. Because river beds and springs provide mixed pasturage and reliable water supplies, they became areas of conflict as both the Xhosa chiefdoms and trekboers sought to control the region's best grazing land.⁴ This tension was exacerbated by the fact that few rivers in the region flow perennially: only the

² John H. Wellington, South Africa: A Geographical Study (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 1:Map III.

³ Wellington, South Africa, 1:Map III, 242-243; Ludwig Alberti, Account of the Tribal Life and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807, trans. W. Fehr (Cape Town: Balkema, 1968), 19-20.

⁴ J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 2.

Sundays, Bushmans and Fish Rivers provide reliable water supplies throughout the year.⁵

Another factor influencing the interaction between Xhosa and European was the variation in veld types throughout the region.⁶ The area east of the Fish River, particularly that bounded by the Fish on the west and the Keiskamma River on the east, has a good mix of sweet and sour veld.⁷ The Fish-Sundays region, however, is composed almost exclusively of sour veld, prompting the trekboers to name the area between the Fish and Bushmans Rivers the Zuurveld.⁸

The difference between veld types is important: areas of sweet and mixed veld allow for year-round pasturing of cattle, while sour veld does not. Cattle can eat sour veld only in the summer; by winter it is no longer nutritious, and continued consumption causes stiff-sickness.⁹

Because sweet veld is more common east of the Fish River, and along river valleys, Xhosa tended to concentrate in these areas during the winter months, leading to a regular cycle of transhumance throughout the region as herders

⁵ Thomas Pringle, Narrative of a Residence in South Africa (London: Moxon, 1835; reprint, Cape Town: Struik, 1966), 104.

⁶ Wellington, South Africa, 1:286-296.

⁷ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 16-17; Barrow, Travels into Southern Africa, 2:78.

⁸ Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 105.

⁹ John Alan Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations, 1770-1803" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1980), 9.

moved their livestock from sour to sweet veld with the onset of winter.¹⁰ This need to migrate in search of pasture was also influenced by drought, which periodically struck the entire area between the Mbashe and Sundays but occurred more frequently west of the Fish River.¹¹

The frontier zone had other important characteristics:

the country is diversified by gentle undulations, and by precipitous woody ravines or kloofs . . . while the whole face of the district, with few exceptions, is covered with a verdant pasture, adorned here and there with groves of evergreens, presenting on an extended natural scale the richest English park scenery.¹²

Extending for nearly three hundred square miles along the Bushmans and Fish Rivers were "immense boundless . . . jungles" that were difficult to traverse but provided a safe refuge to those who knew how to travel the hidden trails.¹³

Xhosa Society and Settlement Patterns

Economy and Subsistence

The Xhosa were primarily a pastoral people. Cattle provided milk, the staple of the Xhosa diet, and acted as the primary form of wealth. They were also used to establish alliances, pay tribute and bridewealth, and as a means

¹⁰ Peires, Phalo, 8-9.

¹¹ Peires, Phalo, 8-9.

¹² R. Martin, History of Southern Africa (London, John Mortimer, 1836), 37-38.

¹³ Andries Stockenstrom, The Autobiography of the Late Sir Andries Stockenstrom, ed. C. W. Hutton, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Juta, 1887), 1:119.

of propitiating the spirits. Care of these animals was so meticulous that Henri Lichtenstein, the German traveller, claimed that the Xhosa "love their cattle exceedingly."¹⁴

Hunting provided meat, the second staple of the Xhosa diet, while farming was also an important source of nutrition. Important cereal crops, such as sorghum and maize, were stored for future use in grain pits.¹⁵

Xhosa were enthusiastic traders, often travelling great distances to obtain valued items such as iron, copper and beads in exchange for hides, ivory and occasionally cattle. Ludwig Alberti noted "an enthusiastic propensity for business amongst these Kaffirs. . . . for the Kaffir, everything is for sale, if a profitable deal is offered. . . ."¹⁶

Traditional Warfare

Competing chiefdoms occasionally fought one another and outside polities in order to gain or maintain control over key resources such as cattle, grazing land or water. Nonetheless, Alberti stated in his work that

the Kaffirs cannot really be called a war-like people; a predominant inclination to pursue a quiet cattle-raising life is much more evident amongst them; they are nevertheless ready to strike, when it comes to

¹⁴ Henri Lichtenstein, Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, trans. A. Plumtre, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1928-1930), 1:330.

¹⁵ Monica Wilson, "The Nguni People," in The Oxford History of South Africa, 2 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1969), 1:109-113.

¹⁶ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 71.

validating certain real or imaginary rights, and which is then done with courage and resolution.¹⁷

Warfare among the chiefdoms was relatively rare, and always conducted according to a strict set of rules. To attack one's enemies without a declaration of war brought dishonor.¹⁸ Battles produced few deaths, the opposing warriors hurling assegais from a distance and rarely engaging in hand-to-hand combat. A few casualties on one side were enough to cause flight, the victors pursuing and seizing as many cattle as possible.¹⁹ However, the winners rarely burnt kraals or killed women and children.²⁰ Armies never destroyed an enemy's productive resources. Crops were spared and it was customary to return a portion of the captured cattle to the losers because, as a Xhosa saying goes, "one must not annihilate one's enemy by hunger."²¹

The abundance of productive resources among the Xhosa polities in the years before contact with whites played a key role in the relatively bloodless nature of conflict. Because there were cattle and land aplenty, wars occurred over questions of political supremacy rather than over the

¹⁷ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 87.

¹⁸ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 90-91; John H. Soga, The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs (Lovedale, South Africa: The Lovedale Press, 1931), 65-67.

¹⁹ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 91-92; John Campbell, Travels in South Africa (London: Black and Parry, 1815), 375.

²⁰ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 92.

²¹ Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 92.

means of physical survival. Xhosa warfare thus mirrored society: with an abundance of land and cattle, the Xhosa did not feel compelled to wage war frequently, and when they did it bore little similarity to that practiced by Europeans.²²

Settlement Patterns and Population

Unlike the trekboers, who were semi-nomadic, the Xhosa lived in permanent, lineage-based homesteads that included from two to one hundred dwellings. These were often located on ridges and close to areas of mixed pasture.²³ The homestead-heads, though subordinate to a chief, enjoyed a large measure of political autonomy.²⁴

By all accounts, the Xhosa were "very numerous" in the late 1700s. Available estimates placed the total population at around 40,000.²⁵ Natural increase as well as constant internal conflict produced a rapid westward expansion that pushed the smaller chiefdoms ahead of their larger enemies. By 1775 these peripheral Xhosa polities began to encounter white settlers moving in the opposite direction.

²² Peires, Phalo, 138.

²³ Wilson, "Nguni," 1:111; Peires, Phalo, 3.

²⁴ Peires, Phalo, 4-5.

²⁵ Richard Collins, "Journal of a Tour to the North-Eastern Boundary, the Orange River, and the Storm Mountains," Part V of The Record, ed. Donald Moodie (Cape Town: Balkema, 1960), 8.

The Nature of Xhosa Political Sovereignty

It has already been stressed that cattle had immense economic and spiritual value to the Xhosa. They also provided the basis of the chiefs' political power, because they allowed them to attract and maintain followers. It is important to note that, prior to contact with Europeans, both cattle and land were plentiful. Conversely, human beings were a relatively scarce commodity.²⁶ The chiefs' coercive power was therefore quite limited, because their followers could simply migrate to empty lands or switch their allegiance to another chief.²⁷ This fact has several critical implications for the nature of Xhosa political relationships. According to Peires, "it should be remembered that absolute domination was no part of the Xhosa political ethic. The power of any chief was limited by what his subordinates were prepared to accept."²⁸

As a result of these limits to chiefly authority, political power tended to shift continually between the various polities as commoners changed allegiances in response to perceived oppression or opportunities for the acquisition of cattle within neighboring chiefdoms. Indeed, the chiefs' political power over their followers was weak enough that they were forced to compete with one another in

²⁶ Peires, Phalo, 40-41.

²⁷ Peires, Phalo, 36.

²⁸ Peires, Phalo, 30.

order to attract commoners.²⁹ They did so by dispensing gifts of cattle to prospective followers. Viewed in this light, generosity was an important chiefly trait.³⁰ The paramount chief Hintsa's speech to his heir Sarhili at the latter's circumcision ceremony in 1834 clearly indicates the importance of cattle in acquiring followers:

Now hear! Love your cattle. My people love me because I love my cattle. Therefore you must love your cattle, as I have done. If you have cattle, poor men will not pass by your place. No, they will stop with you.³¹

Similarly, commoners realized that allegiance to chiefs provided them with security and opportunities to increase their own herds. Because outside threats to the chief's power also endangered the commoners' access to cattle and land, a symbiotic relationship developed in which commoners were willing to accept chiefly authority, and therefore protection, so long as the chief did not become abusive in his exercise of power.³² Once a chief's followers perceived that he had exceeded his authority, however, the result more often than not was mass desertion to another chiefdom.³³ As Peires maintains,

the struggle between chiefs and commoners took the form of a struggle for cattle. Because cattle were the

²⁹ Peires, Phalo, 38.

³⁰ Peires, Phalo, 36.

³¹ Quoted in Peires, Phalo, 62.

³² Peires, Phalo, 38.

³³ Peires, Phalo, 36.

primary means of reproduction in a pastoral society, he who controlled the cattle also controlled the men who depended on them. In this simple fact was rooted the unity of politics and economics which is the most striking feature of precolonial Xhosa society.³⁴

This is very important to an understanding of Xhosa political dynamics both before and after contact with the Europeans. It was only when chiefs and commoners alike experienced cattle and land shortages as a result of white encroachment that they began to perceive Europeans as a serious threat to their political and cultural autonomy.

History of the Xhosa to 1770

The Xhosa are a Bantu-speaking people who settled in the coastal region of South Africa east of the Sundays River in the early second millennium A.D. As population density increased certain lineages dominated others, and by the late 1500s a man named Tshawe had consolidated several lineages into a larger polity. The people who formed this group came to be known as Xhosa, a name derived from the Khoi word meaning "angry men."³⁵ Tshawe's following increased rapidly through the incorporation of neighboring peoples.

As the territory under Tshawe's control increased, the polity assumed the traits of a segmentary state in which Tshawe's male heirs established smaller chiefdoms subordinate to the paramount chief. Tshawe's many descendants

³⁴ Peires, Phalo, 32.

³⁵ Peires, Phalo, 13.

spurred territorial expansion, as each new generation of leaders set out with their age-mates and followers to claim their own lands.³⁶ By the end of the 1600s, Xhosa chiefdoms were established on both sides of the Kei River.

The first external threat to the descendants of Tshawe came from the Ngqosini, who sought to usurp leadership of the Xhosa. Tshiwo, the paramount, defeated them with the help of a councilor named Khwane, who reputedly created a chiefdom of his own from Gonaqua Khoi and condemned Xhosa criminals whom he had secretly saved. Khwane produced his followers at the crucial moment and gained the victory for his chief. As a reward, he was elevated to Tshawe status and his chiefdom became known as the Gqunukhwebe.³⁷

Despite Tshiwo's victory over the Ngqosini, the paramount's power was eroded by structural problems resulting from the rapid expansion and political fragmentation of the Xhosa. From the reign of Phalo (1715-1775), chiefs were ranked according to the position held by their mothers. The paramount always married a woman of the neighboring Thembu people, who became his great wife. Her first son became the legitimate heir to the paramountcy. However, the eldest son of the second-ranking or right-hand wife was entitled to take a share of his father's cattle and establish a chiefdom

³⁶ Peires, Phalo, 19-21.

³⁷ Peires, Phalo, 24-26; Soga, Ama-Xosa, 13; and John H. Soga, The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1930), 116-119.

of his own. Ideally, the right-hand son and his followers moved onto unclaimed lands, as did the other minor sons of each chief, perpetuating the dynamic of expansion that characterized the Xhosa polity, but in practice the sons of chiefs often clashed, causing political instability.³⁸

This process spurred political fragmentation as the number of chiefdoms increased with each generation. Local priorities began to erode loyalty to the paramount, who became increasingly dependent upon a coalition of chiefs who were motivated more by individual concerns than they were by any loyalty to the titular head of the Xhosa polity. Peires argues that "continuing migration and segmentation led to an increase in geographical and genealogical distance, and this considerably diminished the personal understanding and cooperation which were necessary to make up for structural deficiencies."³⁹

With the death of Tshiwo in c. 1702, the process of succession broke down. Tshiwo's great wife did not produce an heir, so his right-hand son, Gwali, became paramount. Several years later, Tshiwo's brother Mdange produced a boy named Phalo, claiming that he was the rightful heir.⁴⁰ Backed by Tshiwo's councilors, Mdange defeated Gwali, despite the latter's alliance with the Ntinde and Gqunukhwebe

³⁸ Peires, Phalo, 29.

³⁹ Peires, Phalo, 28.

⁴⁰ Peires, Phalo, 45; Soga, Bantu, 113-122.

chiefdoms. Gwali and his followers fled, settling west of the Fish River in the area Europeans later named the Agter Bruintjes Hoogte. The Ntinde and Gqunukhwebe also retreated to an area east of the Keiskamma River.⁴¹

Mdange acted as Phalo's regent until c. 1715, when the young chief began to rule directly. The manner in which Phalo was installed, however, and questions about his legitimacy, created further factionalism among the heirs of Tshawe. The Ntinde and Gqunukhwebe remained hostile, and in the 1730s Phalo directed Mdange and his followers to move west to the Nahoon River in an effort to exert greater influence over the two dissident chiefdoms.⁴² The Mdange were joined by the Mbalu, a loyal chiefdom ruled by a man named Langa.⁴³

Thus, the fragmentation that began during the war to install Phalo led by 1750 to the establishment of several chiefdoms that were effectively independent of the paramount and often hostile to him. These divisions among the Xhosa became increasingly important as the outlying chiefdoms moved west and established contact with the Boers.

Phalo's legitimacy remained tenuous, and by the 1740s his great and right-hand sons, Gcaleka and Rharhabe, were

⁴¹ Soga, Bantu, 119-122; Stephen Kay, Travels and Researches in Caffraria (London: John Mason, 1833), 65.

⁴² Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 17; Soga, Bantu, 122.

⁴³ Soga, Bantu, 24.

engaged in a violent power struggle.⁴⁴ This contest, which began 30 years before Phalo's death, underlines the degree to which the power of the paramountcy had eroded. The two were often at war, until in the 1760s Rharhabe was defeated and fled west of the Kei River.⁴⁵ In an effort to rebuild his following, Rharhabe attacked the Mdange and Mbalu, forcing them to retreat towards the Fish River.⁴⁶

Although the paramount was still considered by all the Xhosa to be their titular leader, with the reign of Phalo his effective power ceased to extend much beyond the bounds of his personal chiefdom.

By the 1760s, therefore, fragments of the Xhosa polity were moving steadily towards the Fish River, mostly in an effort to escape larger groups to their east. Further, the Xhosa had split definitively into two major chiefdoms--the Gcaleka and Rharhabe--and five smaller ones: the Mdange, Mbalu, Ntinde, Gqunukhwebe and Gwali. This fragmentation among the Xhosa determined the nature of relations not only among the various chiefdoms, but also between the chiefdoms and white settlers.

⁴⁴ Soga, Bantu, 124, 129-130; Peires, Phalo, 46-47; Alberti, Account of the Xhosa, 97-98.

⁴⁵ Soga, Bantu, 124, 129.

⁴⁶ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 19.

CHAPTER 3
INTERACTION ON THE OPEN FRONTIER, 1770-1811

The Nature of the Frontier

In their work on the history of frontier zones, Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson state that a frontier is not

a boundary or line, but a . . . zone of inter-penetration between two previously distinct societies. Usually, one of the societies is indigenous . . . the other is intrusive. The frontier "opens" in a given zone when the first representatives of the intrusive society arrive; it "closes" when a single political authority has established hegemony over the zone.¹

They further assert that the study of frontiers is rarely as simple as examining the clash between two monolithic groups pitted one against the other. Often, competitors in frontier zones were divided internally, creating a complex web of alliances and conflicts that transcended social or race lines. Lamar and Thompson suggest that

indigenous populations may be so sharply divided among themselves that they persist in devoting more energy to their competition with one another than to resisting the intruders. . . . Europeans did not establish hegemony over frontier zones without exploiting the internal differences among the indigenous societies.²

¹ Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, "Comparative Frontier History," in The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared, ed. Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 7.

² Thompson and Lamar, "Frontier History," 8, 12.

Particularly important here is the understanding that members of indigenous societies did not immediately recognize the threat posed by intrusive groups.³

Xhosa political fragmentation had by 1770 produced a situation in which no single polity could gain supremacy in the frontier zone. Indeed, conflicts among the chiefdoms from 1770 to 1811 combined with the weakness of the Cape government and the small trekboer population to ensure that no single group would dominate the region. The chiefdoms therefore continued to view one another, and not Europeans, as the major threat. William Freund says that it was "precisely because no one government could assert its authority over the frontier area" that the frontier remained "open" prior to the 1811-12 war.⁴ He also argues that "until imperial Britain came to fill the power vacuum, whites had no choice but to deal with Africans as something other than servants. . . ."⁵

The power of the Dutch East India Company was limited, and its influence over the Eastern Frontier was virtually nonexistent. The Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet, for instance, had only three or four mounted police with which to patrol

³ Thompson and Lamar, "Frontier History," 12.

⁴ William Freund, "Thoughts on the Study of the Cape Eastern Frontier Zone," in Beyond the Cape Frontier, ed. Christopher Saunders and Robin Derricourt (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1974), 86.

⁵ Freund, "Frontier Zone," 88.

an area of over 4,000 square miles.⁶ Similarly, neither the Batavian Republic's rule (1803-1806) nor that of the first British administration at the Cape (1796-1803) ever extended to the eastern border.

As a result, trekboers were in certain respects nearly independent of the Colony. It can in fact be argued that colonial rule did not exist on the frontier prior to the second British conquest of the Cape in 1806. This is not to say that the Boers explicitly broke with the Colony. To begin with, they wanted to be seen as legitimate landholders in the eyes of the region's only white government, even if its power did not extend to the eastern border. Trekboers were also reliant on the Company for more practical assistance: supplies of lead and gunpowder came exclusively from Cape Town. And there is much evidence that the Boers maintained regular commercial ties with the Company. Indeed, Cape Town became so dependent on meat from the frontier that during the Third Frontier War (1799-1803), when meat supplies were cut off, nervous residents feared that they might go hungry.⁷

⁶ Report of Commission of Circuit to Governor Cradock, Jan 1813, RCC, 9:62.

⁷ Susan Newton-King, "The Labour Market of the Cape Colony, 1807-28," in Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, ed. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (London: Longman, 1980), 173-174; Robert Percival, An Account of the Cape of Good Hope (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 327-328.

Nevertheless, the trekboers were largely free of the Company's control, and they routinely ignored laws prohibiting trade or association with their African neighbors. Consequently, the Boers clearly should not be thought of as representatives of the Cape Colony, or as enforcers of Company law. Rather, they must be viewed as autonomous actors living on the fringe of European society. Landdrost Woeke of Graaff-Reinet, speaking to this issue, was moved at one point to say that if he was not given a contingent of soldiers with which to force settlers to obey Company laws, "the rot will continue . . . and if not suppressed will increase to such an extent that everyone will act arbitrarily and do everything at his own sweet will."⁸

Finally, the Cape's Eastern Frontier must be viewed as more than a racial or political dividing line. Aside from the fact that it was not an effective political boundary before 1806, and never completely so even after that date, the frontier never divided black from white. It was a zone in which commercial and political contacts between various polities often transcended racial lines. The "open" frontier, which lasted until the Fourth Frontier War (1811-12), must therefore be seen as a place where internal and external relationships between trekboers and the chiefdoms were

⁸ Quoted in Hermann Giliomee, "The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812," in The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, 2d ed., ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 429.

constantly shifting and therefore unstable.⁹ These points provide the underpinnings for the following analysis of interactions in the frontier zone from 1770 to 1811, and of the impact that these relationships, as well as conflicts among the chiefdoms, had on the shaping of Xhosa attitudes towards whites.

Xhosa-European Relations, 1770-1811

Cooperation and Conflict from 1770 to 1781

By the early 1770s, Rharhabe's attempts to subject the smaller chiefdoms to his rule pushed the Gqunukhwebe and Gwali west of the Bushmans River, while the Mbalu moved into the northern half of the Zuurveld.¹⁰ The Mdange "fought frequently, but with so little success, that [they were] compelled to retire. . . ." ¹¹ As a result, they and the Ntinde fled to the Koonap River area.¹²

⁹ See the Lamar and Thompson quote on page 32 for the context in which the "open" frontier is addressed. Also, see Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 426-430.

¹⁰ G. Harinck, "Interaction between Xhosa and Khoi: Emphasis on the Period 1620-1750," in African Societies in Southern Africa, ed. Leonard Thompson, 145-170.

¹¹ Richard Collins, "Journal of a Tour to the North-Eastern Boundary, the Orange River, and the Storm Mountains," Part V of The Record, ed. Donald Moodie (Cape Town: Balkema, 1960), 10.

¹² Andries Stockenstrom, The Autobiography of the Late Sir Andries Stockenstrom, ed. C. W. Hutton, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Juta, 1887), 1:45; Report of Landdrosts, 7 Feb 1779, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:2-3; John Alan Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations, 1770-1803" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1980), 54-60.

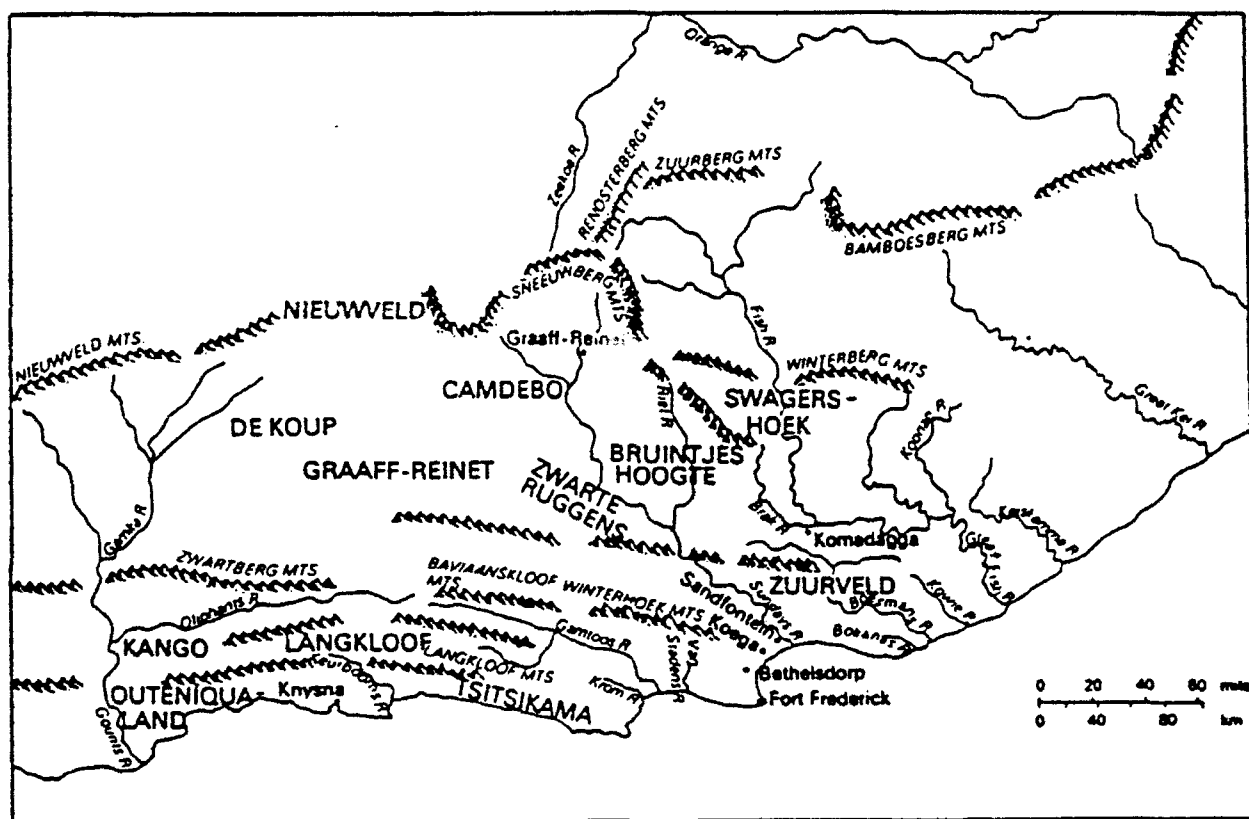


Figure 3-1. The Cape's Eastern Frontier, 1800.

Source: Hermann Giliomee, "The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1818, in The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840, ed. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), Figure 9.1, 423.

At the same time, Europeans were settling at the foot of the Camdebo and Sneeuwberg Mountains along the northern half of the frontier and the Gamtoos River in the south.¹³ By the early 1770s, trekboers had established farms in the Bruintjes Hoogte.¹⁴ In 1775, when Dutch East India Company officers discovered that settlers were east of the Little Fish River, they tried to halt further expansion by declaring the line formed by the Bushmans and upper Great Fish Rivers as the eastern border of the Cape Colony.¹⁵

The Company thus declared lands previously occupied by the Gqunukhwebe, Mbalu and Gwali to be within the Colony. Needless to say, neither these chiefdoms nor any others were consulted in advance. The Company was, however, far too weak to maintain any effective control over the Eastern Frontier. Only a handful of mounted police were allotted to patrol the frontier and laws prohibiting commercial interaction with Africans were simply ignored. More important was the Company's military weakness: no soldiers were stationed in the frontier districts.¹⁶ Frontier defense thus devolved onto the trekboers themselves, who formed mounted commandos to counter San and, later, Xhosa attacks. These

¹³ Report of Landdrosts, 7 Feb 1770, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:2-3.

¹⁴ Petition of 17 Nov 1776 in Moodie, Record, Part 3:60.

¹⁵ Resolution of Council, 27 Dec 1775, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:50.

¹⁶ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 428-429.

commandos, though effective at times, were unable to defeat even the small chiefdoms decisively or to expel them permanently from the region.

The 1775 border adjustment, along with Governor Van Plettenberg's decision in 1780 to move the southern half of the boundary to the lower Great Fish River, were therefore irrelevant with respect to power relationships and settlement patterns on the frontier, at least during this early period. As long as no powerful government authority existed in the frontier zone, whites were unable to expel even the smallest Xhosa polities.

Ironically, however, the 1775 and 1780 border declarations later led British officials and historians to believe that the colonial government had a legal right to expel the Xhosa polities from the Fish-Sundays region. Yet the record clearly shows that the westernmost Xhosa chiefdoms were in possession of the area at least ten years before the first Boers arrived. This undermines the legitimacy of the Cape Colony's claim to the area.

The trekboers, rapidly increasing in number and always in search of new 6,000-acre loan farms, continued to press further east as population pressure and the need for new pasture dictated. Also important in pushing the Boers east rather than north, at least in this early period, was the

furious San opposition in that quarter.¹⁷ Significant in trekboer migration, however, was the lack of any settlement east of the Gamtoos River prior to 1776. Settlers preferred the verdant Bruintjes Hoogte, and only when land pressure became intense there did they move over the Gamtoos.¹⁸ As late as 1784, no settlers lived in the Zuurveld.¹⁹ It is clear, therefore, that the Gqunukhwebe were the region's first non-Khoisan inhabitants, despite arguments in early histories that Boer and Xhosa occupation of the area was simultaneous.

Along the northern portion of the frontier zone the Gwali, Ntinde and Mdange came into contact with trekboers in the early 1770s, and it was here that the first steady interaction occurred. Early relations between black and white, far from being immediately hostile, and despite the Colony's law forbidding trade with Africans, were generally open and cooperative. Xhosa often helped European hunters to find elephants, and trading networks sprang up almost immediately, the chiefdoms providing ivory, hides, baskets and occasionally cattle in return for iron, copper wire and

¹⁷ For evidence of San resistance, see Moodie, Record, Part 3:60-68.

¹⁸ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 62-64; Andries Sparrman, A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope...from the Year 1772-1776, 2d ed., 2 vols. (London, Robinson, 1786; reprint, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1977), 2:11-109, 191-225.

¹⁹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 118-120.

beads.²⁰ A few Gwali and Ntinde, mostly men attempting to amass cattle, also began to work for the trekboers.²¹

The receptions given to early travelers indicate that good relations existed. William Paterson said of the Mbalu in 1779 that they "received us kindly, brought us milk, and offered us a fat bullock agreeably to their usual hospitable custom."²² Colonel Gordon claimed that the Ggunukhwebe "entertained me greatly with their dancing and singing, and walked . . . with us a long way in the best of humor."²³

The essentially cooperative nature of relations can be seen in the absence of cattle thefts or hostilities before 1779. In records relating to this early period, there is not a single reference to cattle theft by the Xhosa.²⁴ Despite the settlers' tendency to leave their herds unattended, the Xhosa did not steal from the Europeans. They even returned strayed animals. When Gordon's horse ran off one night during his stay at a Ggunukhwebe kraal, his hosts promptly located and returned it.²⁵ The Mdange who took Paterson's cattle, thinking them to belong to a rival

²⁰ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 79-80.

²¹ Moodie, Record, Part 3:73, 91.

²² William Paterson, A Narrative of Four Journeys into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffraria (London: Johnson, 1789), 89.

²³ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 89.

²⁴ See Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 91.

²⁵ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 92.

chiefdom, returned the animals as soon as they realized their error.²⁶

Nevertheless, from the first contact frontier relations were strained in a number of respects. These stresses led to war in 1779, and marked the beginning of the process by which chiefs and commoners alike came to view Europeans as the major threat to their political and cultural autonomy. Early friction was exacerbated by fears each party had about the other. The Xhosa knew how Boer commandos operated against the San, killing without regard for age or sex and "apprenticing" survivors; and they were initially terrified of firearms, which they had seen used with devastating effect upon wild game as large as elephants. The settlers, outnumbered by any one of the chiefdoms, became leery whenever large groups of Xhosa visited their farms. In addition, the Boer realization that neighboring chiefdoms could not be dominated by the few whites in the frontier zone, left them feeling insecure.

In 1778, O. G. De Wet, Governor Van Plettenberg's diarist, claimed that the westward movement of the Mdange and their cattle in 1777 had placed a "great burden" on trekboer pastures, stating further that the trekboers "were beginning to fear being outnumbered . . . they did not trust [the Xhosa] and therefore they were forced to leave their

²⁶ Paterson, Narrative of Four Journeys, 86.

farms in the [Great Fish] river area."²⁷ This competition for resources, although limited at first, was the basis for increasing animosities that were ultimately transformed into open hostilities.

Both Xhosa and settlers were guilty of exacerbating tensions. Chiefs harbored runaway slaves and Khoi servants, often refusing offers to repurchase them.²⁸ Also, the Boers failed to see in Xhosa "begging" the social custom of reciprocity.²⁹ Constant Xhosa visits to Boer farms rapidly became burdensome to the impoverished burghers. Trekboer treatment of the Xhosa was worse. Believing that they were merely "black roguish heathens," settlers occasionally kidnapped Xhosa children as servants, threatened Xhosa with their firearms and beat them.³⁰

In 1779, tensions between the two races interacted with conflicts among the chiefdoms to spark the First Frontier War. Central in undermining cooperation on the frontier was an Mdange conflict with the last independent Khoi polity, the Gonaqua. Pushed west by Rharhabe, the Mdange took

²⁷ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 95-96.

²⁸ Sparrman, Voyage to the Cape, 2:126; Letter from Landdrost to Governor Van Plettenberg, 4 Dec 1777, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:72-73.

²⁹ Ludwig Alberti, Alberti's Account of the Tribal Life and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807, trans. W. Fehr (Cape Town: Balkema, 1968), 77-78.

³⁰ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 98-100; J. S. Marais, Maynier and the First Boer Republic (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1944), 7.

Gonaqua lands. In response the Gonaqua, by now working for the Boers, stole Mdange cattle and mixed them with settler herds. As one Xhosa is supposed to have said, the Gonaqua "who had formerly lain among [the Mdange], and now resided among the Christians, constantly carried off [Mdange] cattle, and brought them to this side [of] the Bushmans River. . . ."³¹ This tactic failed because Xhosa cattle differed physically from those of the settlers.

The Mdange retaliated, raiding Boer herds and retaking their cattle, sometimes compensating themselves with colonial animals if theirs had been slaughtered.³² In response to charges of theft, an Mdange chief reputedly exclaimed "you Christians harbor the Gonas Hottentots expressly to steal our cattle; why do you not drive that people back again to us?"³³

Once this process began it rapidly destabilized the frontier zone. Mdange raids, begun in mid-1779, extended to the Swartkops River, and by September trekboers were fleeing west.³⁴ Worse, further Gwali, Ntinde and Mbalu retreats from Rharhabe caused competition for mixed pasture and

³¹ Declaration of J. H. Potgieter, 19 Dec 1779, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:92.

³² Declaration of J. H. Potgieter, 19 Dec 1779, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:92.

³³ Declaration of S. Scheepers, 18 Dec 1779, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:91-92.

³⁴ See various letters in Moodie, Record, Part 3:89-91.

water, both in limited supply between the Fish and Sundays Rivers. This is important because it marks the first time that resource scarcity, rather than political competition, caused the outlying chiefdoms to go to war. Competition for cattle, land and water would henceforth play an increasing role in relations among the chiefdoms and in interactions between the chiefdoms and their Boer neighbors.

The spark for war was provided by the Prinsloo family, who took advantage of a 1778 treaty, between Governor Van Plettenberg and the Gwali chiefs, by which all Xhosa were to retire east of the Fish River.³⁵ The fact that only these chiefs had agreed, and that they had no authority to speak for any others, was of no concern to the settlers. Ostensibly to uphold the treaty, a commando under the Prinsloos took many Mdange cattle. The Mdange retaliated by seizing Willem Prinsloo's herds and burning his house.³⁶

The Boers then formed a second commando, attacking the Mdange and Ntinde, who in turn raided the colony. Two more Boer commandos, practicing tactics perfected against the San, destroyed the principal Mdange and Ntinde villages in

³⁵ J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 54.

³⁶ De Wet to Governor, 13 Mar 1780, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:93.

March 1780, killing many Xhosa and driving away between 4,000 and 6,000 cattle as booty.³⁷

The Mdange and Ntinde were forced to flee to the Kat River, where Rharhabe attacked them and inflicted further damage. The two small groups, however, escaped by fleeing into mountainous areas. This attack by Rharhabe was significant because it was the product of an alliance with the settlers. In a broader sense, however, it was merely a continuation of long-standing political rivalries among the chiefdoms. Rharhabe clearly viewed the alliance as an opportunity to crush the minor polities while incorporating their herds and commoners into his own chiefdom. Adriaan van Jaarsveld led a commando over the Fish River in June 1780, in order to help Rharhabe, but by then the Mdange and Ntinde had fled and nothing more came of the alliance.³⁸

This compact was, however, the first step in a long process by which competition among the chiefdoms and the relationships of those chiefdoms with the settlers interacted to produce a growing awareness among the Xhosa polities that whites posed a grave threat. The Mdange and Ntinde, first to suffer Boer commandos, already understood quite clearly that the whites were dangerous. Other

³⁷ De Wet to Governor, 13 Mar 1780, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:93; Records of Military Court, 25 Oct 1780, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:97-98; Account of Greyling, 20 Jul 1781, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:112.

³⁸ Extract Records, 10 Oct 1780, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:96; Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 108.

chiefdoms became aware of this later, as European actions began to have a direct impact on their political autonomy and access to resources. The Xhosa, politically fragmented when they first encountered the settlers, began very gradually to unite in response to the European threat. This process, as will be made clear in the following chapter, was not well advanced until 1819.

The first chiefdoms to experience commandos were quick to discover ways of dealing with them. Retreat into the thick forests along riverbanks, and to highland areas, quickly became standard practice when commandos threatened. The small chiefdoms also learned the trekboers' key weakness: they inevitably took their booty and went home after only a few weeks in the field. This reflects the fact that the Boers lacked the material and moral backing of a strong government and were therefore incapable of waging long campaigns. Thus, the Mdange simply moved back over the Fish River once the commando disbanded in November 1780.³⁹

In response to the turmoil on the Eastern Frontier, Governor Van Plettenberg reaffirmed the Fish River as the colonial border and authorized Adriaan van Jaarsveld to raise another commando and enforce the boundary.⁴⁰ When the Mdange and Ntinde once again crossed the Fish River in an attempt to escape from Rharhabe, Van Jaarsveld acted.

³⁹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 109.

⁴⁰ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 109.

His commando, "being 92 Christians and 40 Hottentots, with guns,"⁴¹ confronted the Ntinde, who fled when threatened with violence. He then proceeded to the Mdange kraals, where chief Jerambam refused to depart.

In early July 1781, Van Jaarsveld, while meeting with the Mdange, threw a quantity of tobacco on the ground in front of them, and when they ran to pick it up, ordered his men to fire. In the ensuing action, 260 Mdange were killed, 800 cattle taken and the entire village destroyed.⁴² Van Jaarsveld did not stop there. Moving south, he compelled the peaceful Mbalu to withdraw east of the Fish, while the Gqunukhwebe, despite their willingness to leave, were plundered of over 2,000 cattle.⁴³ The commando then disbanded and the trekboers took their booty home, bringing the First Frontier War to a close.

Conflict Overshadows Cooperation: 1781 to 1803

Not surprisingly, the First Frontier War embittered the small chiefdoms as well as the settlers, upsetting the fragile relations that previously existed between them. Both sides lost thousands of cattle, and innocent people were

⁴¹ Van Jaarsveld's Report, 20 Jul 1781, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:111.

⁴² Van Jarsveld's Report, 20 Jul 1781, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:111; Account of Greyling, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:112.

⁴³ Van Jaarsveld's Report, 20 Jul 1781, in Moodie, Record, Part 3:111.

robbed and burnt out of their homes. It is clear, however, that the chiefdoms suffered more than the trekboers. Over 400 Mdange, Ntinde and Gwali were killed, to four or five Boers, a ratio of 100 Xhosa for every European.⁴⁴ Such losses must have been devastating psychologically to the small chiefdoms, given the relatively bloodless nature of traditional warfare.

European tactics also shocked the Xhosa. Boer commandos killed women and children, burnt kraals and retained captive children as slaves at the end of the war. All of these actions were anathema to the Xhosa, as was the brutal action by van Jaarsveld's commando.⁴⁵

Van Jaarsveld's attack is also significant because it set in motion the fragmentation the Mdange polity. In 1784, when a Boer commando killed Jerambam's heir Dlodloo in response to continued Mdange cattle raiding, the chiefdom broke up. Within a few years only small and impoverished fragments remained.⁴⁶ In addition, the heavy cattle losses sustained in conflicts with the trekboers undermined the authority of the remaining Mdange chiefs, because they no longer controlled adequate resources with which to attract and hold followers. As a result, the Mdange fragments, free from effective chiefly control, became inveterate cattle

⁴⁴ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 114.

⁴⁵ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 114.

⁴⁶ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 116-117.

raiders and sworn enemies of the Colony, creating constant instability on the frontier. On more than one occasion, these raiders helped to precipitate wars. Thus, the van Jaarsveld commando contributed to the process by which conflict escalated over the years.

The First Frontier War was a defeat for the small chiefdoms, but these represented only the periphery of the Xhosa people. The larger polities remained unaffected by the Boers' actions. Further, even the minor chiefdoms quickly recrossed the Fish River, and by 1782, in a further retreat from Rharhabe, had again settled in the Zuurveld.⁴⁷

The chiefdoms also resumed cooperative contacts with the Boers. They were eager to trade and to find employment among the settlers. Labor relationships became important because the war had left many commoners from the small chiefdoms destitute. "It has been noticed," said the traveller Von Winckleman, "that their wealth of cattle is declining noticeably, for which reasons are to be found in their hard and damaging wars with the Christians. . . ."⁴⁸ Hundreds of impoverished Xhosa thus became laborers on Boer farms. The locus of these cooperative relations shifted during the 1780s from Bruintjes Hoogte to the Zuurveld.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 121.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 131.

⁴⁹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 127.

Despite frequent cooperation, friction had increased considerably since the First Frontier War. Important here was the colonial claim to exclusive occupation of the area west of the Fish River. Despite an appetite for Xhosa labor and trade goods, most settlers wanted the chiefdoms off of "their" lands. While not a single commando had been called prior to 1779, 18 were formed or threatened between 1784 and 1793.⁵⁰ These commandos never sparked a war before the latter date, contenting themselves with the removal of small Gqunukhwebe, Gwali and Mdange homesteads from areas claimed by settlers. These groups certainly felt some bitterness at being expelled from lands that they considered theirs by right of prior occupation.⁵¹

The actions of particular Boers also raised tensions with the various chiefdoms. Settlers sometimes forced Xhosa to trade cattle, paying little or nothing for them. The Mbalu spoke bitterly of a Boer named Campfer who, "when Langa had come to him from hunting, locked him up in the house, took away his assegays, and would force him to barter cattle."⁵² Worse were the actions of Coenraad de Buys and Coenraad Bezuidenhout. De Buys was in the habit of stealing Xhosa cattle and then "laying [the Xhosa] on the ground and punishing [them], between life and death" when

⁵⁰ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 147.

⁵¹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 147-148.

⁵² Quoted in Marais, Maynier, 24.

they came to complain.⁵³ In 1793 he sparked the Second Frontier War when he seized Langa's wife and made her his concubine.⁵⁴ Bezuidenhout locked up the Gqunukhwebe chief Chungwa and made him turn his mill. During the Second Frontier War, Mbalu and Gqunukhwebe leaders told trekboer commandos that "if the burghers Coenraad de Buys, Coenraad Bezuidenhout and Christoffel Botha . . . were banished from the Colony, then hostilities would cease."⁵⁵

On the other side, Xhosa transhumance patterns angered the settlers. The Mbalu in particular moved their cattle onto trekboer farms, consuming the mixed veld. In 1792, inhabitants of the Zuurveld complained that they "are over-running our farms; they lie with their cattle on and around [them], so that they are grazed bare and there remains no pasture for our stock."⁵⁶ Settlers were also angered over continued Xhosa sheltering of runaway slaves. Finally, cattle raiding by the Mdange infuriated the trekboers.

The process most responsible for the instability on the frontier, however, was warfare among the chiefdoms. Three times between 1789 and 1792, such wars threatened to draw in the colonists, as the smaller polities retreated further into the Colony. By 1789 all five of the smaller chiefdoms

⁵³ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 153.

⁵⁴ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 154.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Marais, Maynier, 29.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 156.

were settled in the Zuurveld or even further west, and herds of 16,000 cattle were not an uncommon sight on colonial farms.⁵⁷ These massive retreats resulted from the aggressive policies of Ndlambe, acting as regent for his nephew Ngqika, Rharhabe's grandson and heir. This warfare between the chiefdoms interacted with the hostility and friction between black and white that had been growing steadily since 1779. By 1793, conditions were again ripe for war.

On top of existing stresses, a severe drought in 1793 created an explosive situation on the Eastern Frontier.⁵⁸ Already short of pasture, settlers were enraged when in April 1793 the Mbalu occupied numerous farms in the process of fleeing from Ndlambe. The Mbalu were responding partly to de Buys' seizure of Langa's wife and they took his cattle in conjunction with their move.⁵⁹ This led to further thefts on both sides. In May 1793 Barend Lindeque, a militia officer, allied with Ndlambe and then tried to drive the small chiefdoms over the Fish River, where Ndlambe waited to crush them. The commando attacked, taking 2,000 cattle from the Gqunukhwebe and Mbalu, but when the Boers saw Ndlambe's army approaching the next day, they mistook them for the enemy and fled.⁶⁰ Ndlambe, disgusted with the settlers,

⁵⁷ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 435.

⁵⁸ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 439.

⁵⁹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 175.

⁶⁰ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 439.

marched his army home, leaving the Gqunukhwebe and Mbalu free to sweep into the colony.⁶¹

These chiefdoms retaliated in May 1793, carrying off as many as 60,000 cattle, killing settlers and their servants and burning houses. By June the Boers had fled beyond the Swartkops River. According to one account, only three houses were left intact in the Zuurveld.⁶²

The colonists struck back the next month, when a large commando under H. Maynier, the Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet District, killed many Xhosa and recaptured 8,000 cattle. The minor chiefdoms were forced over the Fish River, where Ndlambe attacked them, killing Tshaka, the Gqunukhwebe chief and capturing Langa, who died soon afterward.⁶³

The remnants of the Mbalu and Gqunukhwebe managed to sneak back into the Colony and Maynier, discouraged by his inability to root them out of the bush, agreed to a peace whereby the belligerents kept all captured cattle. The commando disbanded in November, and the war ended.⁶⁴

The Second Frontier War, as disastrous as it was for the small chiefdoms, was more so for the settlers. Much of the Zuurveld was devastated, and few Boers remained east of

⁶¹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 172.

⁶² Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 439, n. 80.

⁶³ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 439-440.

⁶⁴ Collins, "Journal," 11.

the Sundays River.⁶⁵ At the same time, the remaining Gqunukhwebe under Tshaka's son Chungwa had retreated further from Ndlambe than ever, settling between the Bushmans and Sundays Rivers. Further, the westernmost chiefdoms were left in possession of huge areas abandoned by the Boers. By 1795 small Gqunukhwebe and Gwali homesteads had appeared as far west as Swellendam District.⁶⁶

Once again, warfare among the chiefdoms was directly responsible for further penetration into the Colony. Ngqika had come of age, and the resulting conflict between him and Ndlambe, stemming from the latter's reluctance to give up power, led to war in 1795. Ndlambe was allied with the young paramount, the Gcaleka chief Hintsa, but the two were defeated and captured by Ngqika.⁶⁷ Ndlambe's allies, including his brother Myalusa, fled over Fish River, pushing the smaller polities in front of them.

By 1797 the Gqunukhwebe had moved to the Sundays River in order to escape Ngqika's attacks.⁶⁸ The resulting strife with settlers underscored the fact that conflict had come to overshadow cooperation. Increasing competition for resources angered all parties, and the trekboers complained that "Caffers by hundreds, accompanied by thousands . . . of

⁶⁵ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 440.

⁶⁶ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 190.

⁶⁷ Peires, Phalo, 51.

⁶⁸ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 187-189.

cattle . . . come to dwell in our Districts, in so much that our pasturages are consumed away."⁶⁹

Also, as the Mdange polity further disintegrated during the 1790s, cattle raiding became a serious problem for the settlers. "The Mandankae [Mdange] race," said one observer, "were the most inveterate in pursuing a system of hostility to their colonial antagonists."⁷⁰ Nor were the Mdange alone: Gqunukhwebe, Gwali, Mbalu and Ntinde, all impoverished by the second war, began raiding trekboer herds.⁷¹ Many joined runaway Khoi and formed bandit groups that stole small numbers of settler cattle.⁷²

Although cooperative relationships did not disappear in the period between 1793 and the Third Frontier War in 1799, they were eclipsed by the growing conflict between the minor chiefdoms and their European neighbors. It is important to note that this tension was a product not only of increasing competition for resources between black and white, but also of the friction caused by continuing warfare among the Xhosa chiefdoms.

In 1799, war came again to the Eastern Frontier. This time, however, it was not a direct result of Xhosa-settler animosities. Nor was it due to strife among the Xhosa

⁶⁹ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 192.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 195.

⁷¹ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 196.

⁷² Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 196.

polities. In February, a Boer rebellion against the first British administration at the Cape, in power since 1796, threw the frontier into turmoil. A British force composed largely of the new Cape (Khoikhoi) Regiment was sent to crush the uprising. When Khoi servants heard of this they revolted, killing their trekboer masters, burning farmhouses and carrying off hundreds of muskets.⁷³

The Gqunukhwebe in particular were apprehensive about the British troops. Boer rebels seeking Xhosa help told them that the troops had come to expel them, and their suspicions were borne out in April 1799 when the General Vandeleur turned from stamping out the rebellion to pushing them over the Fish.⁷⁴ Vandeleur's forces engaged in two skirmishes with the Gqunukhwebe, and casualties ensued on both sides.⁷⁵ Two weeks later, a Boer commando was disastrously defeated by the Mdange, Myaluza, and a large number of Khoi rebels who had taken up residence with them, losing five killed and over one hundred horses.⁷⁶ A worse defeat came days later when a detachment of British regulars was ambushed and 16 soldiers killed.⁷⁷

⁷³ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 442.

⁷⁴ John Barrow, An Account of Travels into Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798, 2 vols. (London: A. Strahan, 1801), 1:393-395, 403.

⁷⁵ Barrow, Travels into Southern Africa, 414-415.

⁷⁶ Vandeleur to Dundas, 31 Jul 1799, RCC, 2:453-455.

⁷⁷ Vandeleur to Dundas, 31 Jul 1799, RCC, 2:453-455.

Although the Xhosa and Khoi had different aims during the war -- better working conditions versus land rights and cattle holdings -- they cooperated. The combination of Khoi firepower and Xhosa mobility devastated their European enemies. Khoi and Xhosa penetrated to the Lange Kloof and destroyed almost every house east of the Gamtoos River.⁷⁸ The British, desperate for peace, patched together a treaty in October 1799. The Khoi were promised better work conditions and the Xhosa chiefdoms were "allowed" to stay between the Fish and Sundays Rivers so long as they remained peaceful. No exchange of captured cattle occurred, leaving the Xhosa with thousands of Boer animals.⁷⁹

However, the treaty only provided an interlude between hostilities, and until open warfare began anew in 1802 the frontier was convulsed by numerous depredations.⁸⁰ Lichtenstein noted that the Boers were often to blame, stating that after 1799 they

went from time to time in little parties over the borders . . . and drove away [Xhosa] cattle. Reprisals were naturally resorted to, and thus . . . a petty warfare was carried on between . . . the Caffers . . . and the inhabitants of the Bruinjeshoogte, Zwagershoek, and a part of the Snow mountains.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Vandeleur to Dundas, 3 Aug 1799, RCC, 2:456-457.

⁷⁹ Dundas to Yonge, 20 Feb 1800, RCC, 3:53-56.

⁸⁰ Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 240-241.

⁸¹ Henri Lichtenstein, Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806, trans. A. Plumptre, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1928-1930), 1:364.

In 1801 another Boer rebellion led once again to mass Khoi desertions. Tjaart Van der Walt organized a large commando and set out to pacify them. But the Khoi defeated Van der Walt's commando and then retaliated, forcing the few Boers remaining east of the Sundays River to flee and ravaging large areas of Swellendam. The Khoi were joined by a few dispossessed Mdange, Ntinde and Gwali.⁸²

In April 1802 Van der Walt again took the field, but instead of limiting his operations to the Khoi rebels and their Xhosa allies, he indiscriminately attacked every minor chiefdom west of the Fish. The Boers took 12,000 cattle, burned kraals and killed many men, women and children.⁸³ However, the death of Van der Walt in August led to the break-up of the commando, one wing seizing another 3,200 Gqunukhwebe cattle on the way home. These outrages, and the premature dispersal of the Boer commando, led to disaster for the settlers.⁸⁴

The minor chiefdoms struck back, raiding throughout the eastern areas of the frontier zone. Colonists later reported that they lost 50,000 cattle, as many sheep and over 1,000 horses in these attacks, in addition to being forced

⁸² Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 443; Hopper, "Xhosa-Colonial Relations," 247-248.

⁸³ Marais, Maynier, 141.

⁸⁴ Marais, Maynier, 143-144.

completely out of the Fish-Sundays region.⁸⁵ By February 1803 both sides were exhausted, and a peace treaty was enacted that again allowed the combatants to keep all captured livestock.

Conciliation in the Aftermath of War, 1803-1809

The small chiefdoms, although clearly winning the war prior to the treaty, had reasons for making peace: in late 1800 Ndlambe escaped from Ngqika, gathering a large following and moving west of the Fish to reassume the leadership of his brother Myaluza's followers. Both Ndlambe and the smaller polities were nervous about a prospective settler-Ngqika alliance, and after 1802 they made huge efforts to appease the settlers, despite victory in the war.⁸⁶ Xhosa-European relations actually improved, if only for a time.

The Batavian Republic's short rule at the Cape (1803-1806) also led to better relations between Xhosa and Boer. Most Khoi were convinced to return to their masters' farms after the peace, and the few remaining rebels were bullied into submission by the Xhosa, who feared that constant Khoi raiding would again bring war.⁸⁷ Colony officials also forced Boers to settle once again in the area east of the

⁸⁵ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 443.

⁸⁶ Susan Newton-King and V. C. Malherbe, The Khoikhoi Rebellion in the Eastern Cape (1799-1803) (Cape Town: University Press, 1981), 56.

⁸⁷ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 444.

Sundays River, but the region remained largely under Xhosa control during this time.⁸⁸ Despite their conciliatory stance, Batavian officials were as committed as their Company predecessors to the expulsion of all Xhosa chiefdoms over the Fish River. They were, however, far too weak to force even the smallest chiefdoms to depart. Nevertheless, the Batavians believed that they could convince Ngqika to ally with them in order to expel the minor polities from "colonial" territory.

In June 1803 Governor Janssens, having failed to talk the small chiefdoms across the Fish River, met with Ngqika in order to discuss an alliance. Ngqika was at the height of his power, having defeated both Ndlambe and Hintsa in 1795. He even called himself the "inkosi enkhulu" or Great Chief of the Xhosa, a title customarily reserved for the paramount.⁸⁹ Despite Janssens' arguments that an alliance would benefit Ngqika by forcing the minor chiefs to accept his authority, the young chief refused to ally with the Batavians. Nevertheless, the meeting was significant because it marked the point at which Europeans began to treat Ngqika as the supreme chief of the Xhosa. It will become clear in the next chapter that this continued during the second period of British rule, despite the fact that Ngqika

⁸⁸ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 444; Collins, "Journal," 15.

⁸⁹ John Milton, The Edges of War (Cape Town: Juta, 1983), 55-56.

lacked real authority over his rivals. This relationship ultimately became the means by which the Colony began to destroy Xhosa independence.

By 1807, the position of Ndlambe and the other chiefs west of the Fish seemed secure. They had defeated the Colony in the third war, gaining thousands of cattle and new grazing lands in the process. In addition, Ndlambe's power increased significantly when his wife Thuthula was kidnapped by Ngqika. It is unclear just what Ngqika meant to gain by this action, but it had disastrous results. The Xhosa, who had a strong incest taboo, viewed Ngqika's relationship with his uncle's wife as incestuous.⁹⁰ Consequently, Ngqika's followers deserted to Ndlambe by the thousands. Among this number was Ndlambe's brother Myaluza, who only two years before had joined Ngqika's chiefdom. Ndlambe then crushed Ngqika's remaining warriors in battle, forcing the young chief to flee with his last few followers and a handful of cattle. The threat from Ngqika had apparently subsided.⁹¹

Finally, relations with the settlers were better than they had been in years. Despite the friction caused by continued Mdange cattle raiding, cooperative interaction resumed, many Xhosa coming to the Boers for trade and employment. Most of the chiefs went to great lengths to

⁹⁰ Peires, Phalo, 59.

⁹¹ Peires, Phalo, 59.

recover and return colonial cattle stolen by the Mdange.⁹² One traveller remarked in 1806 that the frontier zone was "one of the most quiet and peaceful parts of the colony."⁹³

Past hostilities, however, and the manner in which conflicts among the chiefdoms impacted relations with the trekboers, created an environment in which war was always just below the surface. Central here was the increasing competition for limited resources. Both Xhosa and settler populations grew during the period. In 1798, 26 percent of the male colonists on the Eastern Frontier owned farms, the rest being landless "bywoners;" by 1812 the total had shrunk to 18 percent.⁹⁴ The frontier zone had always provided the small chiefdoms with the means of escaping their larger neighbors to the east, and trekboers with economic opportunities they lacked in the western Cape.⁹⁵ By 1809 little unoccupied land remained and relations began to reach a critical point.

British rule after 1806 exacerbated these problems. By 1810, Governor Caledon had decided to force the westernmost Xhosa chiefdoms over the Fish River. His successor,

⁹² Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 446.

⁹³ Quoted in Ben MacLennan, A Proper Degree of Terror (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 47.

⁹⁴ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 450.

⁹⁵ S. Daniel Neumark, Economic Influences of the South African Frontier, 1652-1836 (Stanford: University Press, 1957), 35-56.

Governor Cradock, was of the same mind and it was he who ordered the 1811-12 expulsions. The desire to expel the chiefdoms from "colonial" territory was nothing new. Unlike previous governments, however, the British regime had the means to enforce its will. By October 1811 Governor Cradock had amassed adequate force at the Cape to achieve his aims.

Mounting Tensions, 1809 to 1811

In 1809 Jacob Cuyler, Landdrost of Uitenhage District, received orders from Governor Caledon to enforce laws forbidding trade between Africans and settlers.⁹⁶ Such laws had long existed, but the means of enforcing them had not, and in the years since the Third Frontier War many Xhosa had found work with the Boers.⁹⁷ Caledon dispatched part of the Cape Regiment to Cuyler, who promptly forced "some thousands" of Xhosa laborers to depart.⁹⁸ He also rounded up the small parties of Gqunukhwebe and Gwali that had settled in Swellendam District, forcing them to retire east of the Sundays River under threat of violence.⁹⁹

Most of the Xhosa who worked in the colony were men attempting to rebuild herds lost in the wars, although many

⁹⁶ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 59-60.

⁹⁷ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 59-60; Statements of Gardner and Maretz on Employment of Xhosa, PP50, 174.

⁹⁸ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 447; Letter from Moodie to Gregory, 6 Dec 1823, PP50, 176.

⁹⁹ Statements of Gardner and Maretz, PP50, 174.

women also found work as domestics. Angered by the British action and unable to find employment among their own chiefdoms, the erstwhile laborers turned to cattle raiding in order to build their herds and feed their families. Just before the expulsions, the elder Andries Stockenstrom stated that "perfect tranquillity, good order and subordination now reign in this part of the settlement."¹⁰⁰ The change wrought by Cuyler's campaign was remarkable: in the last quarter of 1809, 935 cattle were stolen, while less than one hundred had been stolen in the preceding nine months.¹⁰¹

In response to Boer demands for military assistance, Governor Caledon sent 580 soldiers to the frontier. The Xhosa viewed this move as a prelude to war, and tension on the frontier mounted, over 2,000 cattle being taken in 1810.¹⁰² By June 1811 a British officer reported that

the country is on every side overrun with Kaffres, and there never was a period when such numerous parties of them were known to have advanced so far in every direction before; the depredations of late committed by them exceed all precedent and . . . unless some decisive and hostile measures are immediately adopted, I solemnly declare that I apprehend considerable and most serious consequences.¹⁰³

Ndlambe and Chungwa, well aware of the dangers another war would pose, particularly in view of Ngqika's friendship

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 63.

¹⁰¹ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 63.

¹⁰² Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 446.

¹⁰³ Hawkes to Cuyler, 24 June 1811, RCC, 8:88.

with the Colony, put pressure on the Mdange and other small chiefdoms to stop the raids.¹⁰⁴ Although somewhat successful, their efforts were both too little and too late: on 30 September 1811 the new Governor, Sir John Cradock, ordered Colonel John Graham to expel the westernmost Xhosa polities from colonial territory by force. The Xhosa avenue of expansion and retreat was about to be cut off.

The Significance of the Early Period

Migrations of the smaller chiefdoms within the frontier zone between 1770 and 1811 indicate that, with few exceptions, their leaders remained more concerned about the threat posed by major chiefs such as Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika than they were about the whites. Why else would they have continued to retreat amongst the Boers? Most scholars of Xhosa history, with the exceptions of Peires and Hopper, have missed this point, focusing on white-black dichotomies as initially constructed by Theal and Cory in their histories. It is apparent at this point that such works, relying as they do on strict lines of division between black and white, do not effectively highlight the complex interactions that occurred between the races during this early period. In particular, they obscure the fact that Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika maintained better relations with the trekboers than they did with the other heirs of Tshawe.

¹⁰⁴ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 447-448.

In addition, while the first three frontier wars must have shocked the Mdange, Ntinde, Mbalu and Gwali with their brutality and great loss of life, the fact remains that these small polities continued to move west prior to 1812. This indicates that the minor chiefs remained more concerned about their more powerful relatives than they were about the trekboers. Before the second British administration of the Cape, Boers lacked the resources and discipline to expel even the smallest chiefdoms from the Fish-Sundays region on a permanent basis, not to mention the larger ones. This must have convinced the smaller polities to take their chances among the settlers, rather than face the large chiefdoms to the east.

Such findings throw into question the statement made by Clifton Crais about the Third Frontier War, that "Xhosa saw the war as a desperate attempt to halt the encroachment of colonists."¹⁰⁵ Only a few of the minor chiefdoms joined the Khoi against their masters, while most of the larger polities remained neutral. This indicates that the more powerful chiefs remained only moderately concerned about the dangers posed by the European presence. As for Crais' ideas about encroachment, it would seem that the reverse was true: until 1811 it was the settlers, not the Xhosa, who were forced to give way.

¹⁰⁵ Clifton C. Crais, White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 51.

At first glance it seems surprising that, prior to the Fifth Frontier War (1818-19), the heirs of Tshawe never presented a unified front against white encroachment. Given Boer weaknesses and the nature of political relationships among the chiefdoms, however, it is easy to comprehend. Chiefs and commoners alike understood the most dangerous enemy to be the one that posed the greatest threat to their lands and herds. Thus, for the minor chiefdoms with their relatively small followings and cattle holdings, both the trekboers and the larger chiefdoms were viewed as dangerous foes. For powerful chiefs such as Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika, however, neither the trekboers nor the minor chiefs posed much of a threat. Indeed, Rharhabe and Ndlambe allied with the settlers against the minor chiefdoms precisely because all parties involved hoped to subject the small polities to their will. The trekboers sought to force large numbers of Xhosa into the settler economy. Similarly, Ndlambe and Ngqika wanted to incorporate the defeated commoners into their own followings. This explains why the small polities--the Mdange, Mbalu, Ntinde and Gwali--were the ones most disrupted by the early frontier wars.

Viewed in this light, it is the theme of political rivalries among the chiefdoms that dominates frontier history in this period. Continuing attempts by Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika to conquer the smaller polities led to frequent retreats into the Colony. This process had a

greater impact on relations between the chiefdoms and the settlers than did any other single factor. This ongoing strife, and the weakness of the Boers relative to the larger chiefdoms, combined to ensure that little political unity developed among the heirs of Tshawe prior to 1811.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the first three frontier wars made the minor chiefdoms painfully aware of the threat posed by whites. Boer commandos inflicted crushing defeats on them, and acts such as van Jaarsveld's massacre rankled in the Xhosa memory. The early wars thus began an evolutionary process by which first the minor chiefs and gradually the more powerful ones came clearly to understand that Europeans posed a danger to their lands and herds and, therefore, to their followings and the underpinnings of their political and economic power. The fact remains, however, that the larger polities did not begin to view white encroachment with alarm until after 1811.

Giliomee effectively summarizes the early period of interaction when he says that "although stable relations and various forms of cooperation existed at times between the various peoples, conflict was pervasive."¹⁰⁶ His statement must be qualified, however, with the assertion that conflict came to outweigh cooperation in the frontier zone only after 1793. In addition, it was not only black-white conflict that occurred during this time. Indeed, for this early

¹⁰⁶ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 461.

period, the historical evidence suggests that warfare among the chiefdoms destabilized the frontier to a greater extent than did friction between the races. Nevertheless, given the increasing scarcity of land and cattle in the frontier region, Giliomee's argument is compelling. As he says of the competition for resources, "It is hard to believe that conflict between the colonists and Xhosa would have occurred on such a large scale had it not been for their opposing material interests."¹⁰⁷ Once again, however, it is important to note that the same argument could be made about conflict among the chiefdoms. Unfortunately, Giliomee does not address this issue in his work.

One key result of the interaction between Xhosa internal conflict and relations with the Europeans, was the fragmentation of the Mdange chiefdom and, to a lesser extent, the Ntinde, Mbalu and Gwali. This led directly to the rise of cattle raiding as a key form of Xhosa resistance. The stereotype among pro-settler historians that Xhosa-European relations revolved around cattle raiding from the earliest days of contact is patently false. Far from being "tribes of thieves and murderers," the Xhosa never stole cattle from the Boers before 1779, and cattle raiding was rare through the 1790s.¹⁰⁸ Thefts that did occur during

¹⁰⁷ Giliomee, "Eastern Frontier," 434.

¹⁰⁸ George Cory, The Rise of South Africa, 6 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910; reprint, Cape Town: Struik, 1965), 3:41.

the first two wars were considered by the Xhosa to be acts of war, in line with the fact that cattle raiding was the principal means of conducting warfare in Xhosa society.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, the fragmentation of the Mdange into small and impoverished groups, free of chiefly control, led to increasing raids on colonial cattle both in revenge for war losses and as a means of rebuilding their own herds. Such raiding during the periods between wars was neither condoned nor, for the most part, tolerated by Xhosa chiefs, who saw such actions as serious threats to stability and peace on the frontier. Raiding, however, increased as more Xhosa were impoverished by war and increasing resource scarcity, and as chiefdoms such as the Mbalu and Ntinde were further fragmented by continuing frontier warfare.

Prior to the serious disturbances of 1810-11, peacetime raiding was relatively uncommon. After that period, however, raiding developed into a key means of resistance during war and peace. While the small chiefdoms remained the major participants until the Fourth Frontier War, afterwards the larger polities began to raid in retaliation for land and cattle losses. By the 1820s, cattle raiding had become a central means of resistance as well as a major cause of instability and war on the frontier.

In summary, it is clear that although the minor chiefdoms came to view Europeans as dangerous enemies during the

¹⁰⁹ Peires. Phalo, 55.

early period, they remained more concerned about the threat posed by their larger neighbors to the east. This was the logical result of continuing aggression on the part of such leaders as Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika, and of trekboer weaknesses prior to 1806. Nevertheless, Xhosa awareness of the danger posed by whites, and the reaction to it, developed steadily from the First Frontier War. The small chiefdoms on the western periphery of Xhosa-occupied territory discovered early what it was like to experience Boer commandos: the Mdange, Ntinde, Mbalu and Gwali were virtually destroyed by them during the first three wars. These were the groups that began raiding, a resistance tool that matured during the 1820s. Nevertheless, attitudes towards Europeans developed only gradually. Indeed, by 1811 only the minor chiefdoms had developed a clear appreciation for the European threat. Such an understanding would not become universal among the Xhosa until 1819.

CHAPTER 4
THE CRUCIAL DECADE: RELATIONS FROM 1811-1820

The Nature of British Rule

With the second British takeover at the Cape, profound changes occurred along the Eastern Frontier. Although the Xhosa chiefs could not know it at the time, they were dealing with a very different sort of authority than that of the Dutch East India Company, the first British administration or the Batavian Republic. These governments had been too weak to involve themselves directly in frontier affairs. They had passed laws against economic and political interaction with Africans, but these had been ignored by the trekboers, who were in many respects free of colonial control.

In fact, one can argue with some justification that prior to 1806 no real government authority existed on the frontier. True, the Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet was appointed by the governor. But did this really matter? In order to enforce the Company's laws in an area covering some 4,000 square miles, he was given only a handful of deputies, far too few to stop contacts between settlers and Africans.¹ Similarly, the Company's constant declarations moving the

¹ J. S. Marais, Maynier and the First Boer Republic (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1944), 14.

border eastward were irrelevant in a practical sense. Trekboers claimed the lands within the border as their own, but were too weak to keep even the smallest chiefdoms out. As a result, they often had to ally with powerful chiefs such as Rharhabe, Ndlambe and Ngqika in order to achieve their political and economic objectives.

However, with the second British administration, a new set of relations developed. England was the first truly colonial power on the frontier, in the sense that it had both the will and the resources to control the borders of the Cape Colony. As the chiefs discovered after 1806, British involvement in their political affairs was far more dangerous than earlier alliances with the trekboers had been, for the simple reason that British material resources were much greater than those of their predecessors.

British officials were concerned about maintaining order along the frontier. Their interest in the Cape Colony, at least in this early period, was strategic. Cape Town marked the halfway point to India, the jewel in the English crown, and for this reason the British were determined to hold onto the Colony. Nevertheless, they wished to do so as inexpensively as possible. Consequently, part of their plan to keep costs low was a total prohibition on economic or social interaction with the Xhosa polities, in order to prevent instability and war. As John Galbraith states, "at the Cape the material interest was not profit,

but its obverse, economy."² Because of this philosophy, commercial relations were forbidden from 1809 until 1817. British policy along the frontier was thus based on the dual objectives of economy and non-intercourse. It will become clear below that the Cape governors enacted these policies ruthlessly, if not always effectively.

British policies towards the Cape Colony and the Xhosa chiefdoms thus clearly affected relations and events on the frontier. Less evident, though just as important, was their impact on conflict among the chiefdoms, as the Cape Colony came increasingly to influence Xhosa internal politics after 1811. It was the interaction between this increasing colonial influence and continuing animosities among the chiefdoms that was finally to convince the Xhosa, in the decade between 1811 and 1820, that the Cape Colony posed a grave threat to their political and cultural independence. This realization ultimately brought about a greater degree of political unity among the Xhosa chiefdoms than had ever before existed.

Expulsion from the Fish-Sundays Region

On Christmas Day 1811, Colonel John Graham began his campaign to expel the Xhosa. He was acting on orders from Governor Cradock stating that "as the measures of passive

² John S. Galbraith, Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier, 1834-1854 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 27.

conciliation and tolerance have proved ineffectual, it is necessary to adopt another mode of proceeding, and their complete expulsion from our territory must be accomplished."³ Four columns totalling 871 men advanced on the Xhosa kraals. The Fourth Frontier War had begun.

However, expelling the Xhosa would not be an easy task. East of the Sundays River, and stretching for over 40 miles from the Zuurberg to the Indian Ocean, lay the Addo Bush. A tangled mass of evergreens and thorns, the area was an ideal refuge for the Xhosa. As Graham's forces moved forward Ndlambe, despite the fact that he lived 30 miles east along the Bushmans River, brought his warriors forward to the Addo Bush and joined the Gqunukhwebe.⁴ At the same time, the small chiefdoms to the north, including the Mbalu, Ntinde, Gwali and Mdange, took refuge in the Zuurberg mountains.

When Landdrost Cuyler, leading one of the columns, met Ndlambe at the edge of the Addo Bush and demanded his withdrawal over the Fish River, the chief exclaimed "this country is mine! I won it in war, and shall keep it." The Landdrost rode off, attempting to entice the Xhosa out of the bush. Ndlambe, however, refused to follow.

³ Cradock to Graham, 6 Oct 1811, RCC, 8:159-163.

⁴ Ben MacLennan, A Proper Degree of Terror (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 100.

⁵ Graham, no addressee, 2 Jan 1812, RCC, 8:235.

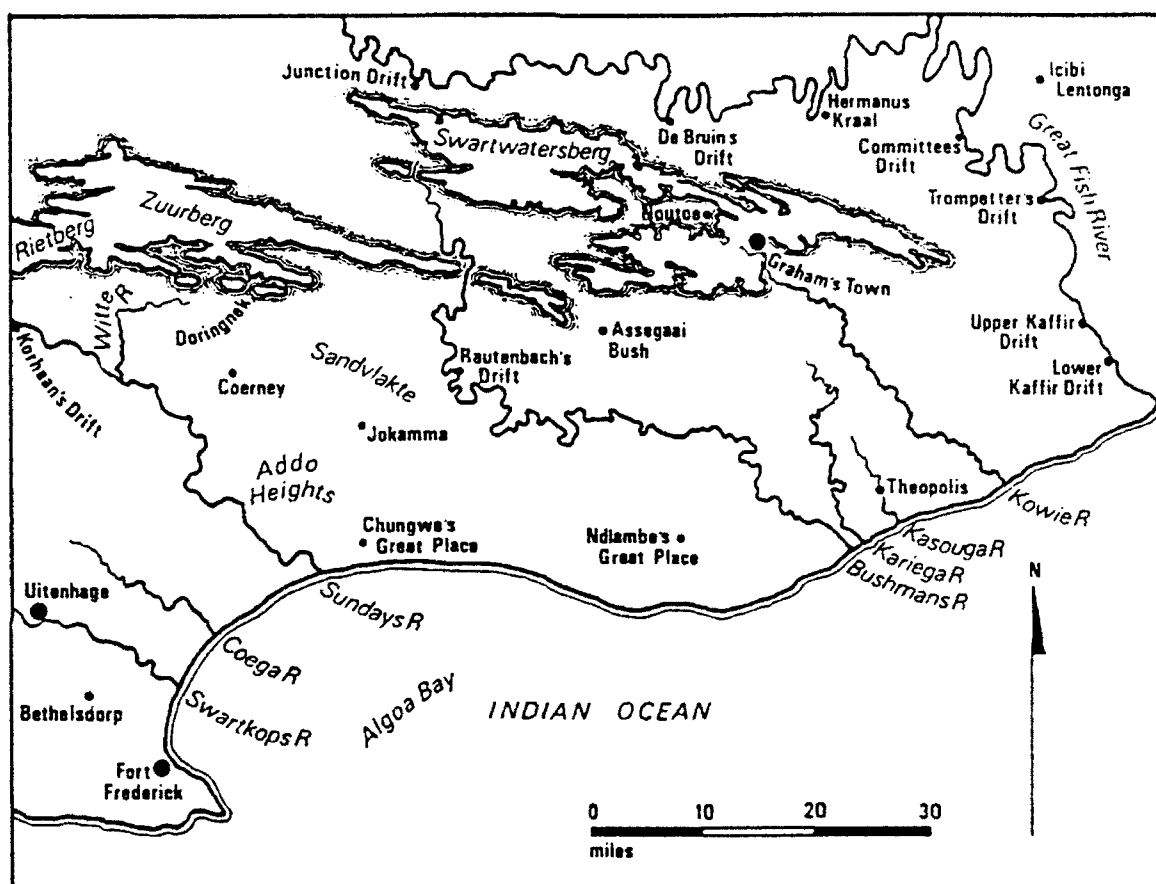


Figure 4-1. The Zuurveld, 1811-1820.

Source: Ben MacLennan, A Proper Degree of Terror (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), Map 2, 42.

Graham realized that Ndlambe was the key: if he could be made to depart, the smaller chiefdoms would follow suit. He thus ordered the elder Andries Stockenstrom, Landdrost of Graaff Reinet and commander of the northernmost column, to meet him for a concerted attack on Ndlambe.

Stockenstrom, however, decided first to parley with the chiefs in his area, and convince them that a peaceful withdrawal was their best option. As he negotiated with them, a Xhosa runner arrived bearing news of the previous day's actions to the south, in which several of Chungwa's and Ndlambe's warriors had been killed. The enraged chiefs ordered their men to attack the unsuspecting burghers. In the ensuing action, Stockenstrom and 14 others were killed.

Survivors reached Graham's camp, where word of the attack raised tempers to a fever pitch. Graham wrote to Cradock that "the determined declaration of Ndlambe, with the horrid aggressions committed by the Kaffirs, would seem to leave you with but one path to pursue."⁶ That path was the violent and total expulsion of the westernmost chiefdoms from the Fish-Sundays region.

On 3 January 1812, Graham's troops entered the Addo Bush from the north and emerged four days later, having killed only 12 Gqunukhwebe and captured a handful of cattle. They did, however, find the old chief Chungwa, too sick to

⁶ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 109.

move, and shot him as he lay in his bed.⁷ Kraals were burnt and crops destroyed, while women and children were shot by Boer militiamen who fired at every movement in the thick bush. Another force was sent in on the 8th, which seized 2,500 cattle. This was too much for the Gqunukhwebe, already shaken by the death of their chief and the destruction of their kraals and fields. After the second colonial assault they retreated towards the east.⁸

Graham then advanced on Ndlambe's principal village by the Bushmans River, but by the time he arrived, Ndlambe had withdrawn, realizing that resistance would bring disaster to his people. Joining the Gqunukhwebe, Ndlambe's followers retreated over the Fish River. They were followed by Bhotomane, chief of the remaining Mdange, and Nqeno with his Mbalu. These chiefs no doubt believed that, as with previous conflicts, they would be able to return to their lands once the colonial force disbanded. They were, however, to be rudely surprised in this respect.⁹

Having pushed most of the chiefdoms over the Fish, Graham turned to the destruction of their productive assets. Graham's adjutant, Robert Hart, described the process:

Friday 17th, two parties of 100 men each were sent to destroy gardens and burn huts and villages. . . .

⁷ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 112.

⁸ Graham to Reynell, 8 Jan 1812, RCC, 8:239-240; CTG/AA, 18 Jan 1812.

⁹ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 114-115.

Sunday 18th, 300 men went early to destroy gardens and huts, taking with them 600 oxen to trample down the covered vegetables in the gardens.¹⁰

These actions were timed to coincide with the period when crops matured. "We chose the season of corn being on the ground," Graham later told the Colony's ally Ngqika, "in order . . . that we might the more severely punish them for their many crimes by destroying it."¹¹ By February, every kraal in the Fish-Sundays region had been destroyed.

The colonial forces now turned their attention to the Zuurberg, where the Ntinde, Gwali and a few Mdange kraals had defied Graham's orders to retire. Beginning on 13 February, they were systematically hunted down. Over 300 were killed in exchange for one Boer, and 600 cattle were taken. The same destruction of kraals and gardens followed, and by March the last stragglers had been driven out.¹²

In two months, Graham's forces had ruthlessly and completely driven some 20,000 men, women and children from the Fish-Sundays region. Starvation threatened the refugees, whose gardens had been destroyed and who were in any case unable to reenter the Zuurveld in order to forage.

They were unable to return because the British, with greater resources than those of any preceding government,

¹⁰ Quoted in J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 65-66.

¹¹ Graham to Ngqika, undated, RCC, 21:350.

¹² MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 124-125.

had constructed 30 small forts along the Fish River and garrisoned them with a permanent force of several hundred soldiers. Graham also ordered that any Xhosa found in the Colony be shot on sight.¹³ Further, he authorized pursuit of raiders east of the Fish River, giving his men permission to kill any who resisted if overtaken. Within weeks, Governor Cradock confirmed these harsh policies by proclamation.¹⁴ The Xhosa avenue of retreat and access to new lands had been effectively and permanently cut off.

The Expulsion in Perspective

Several scholars of Xhosa history have argued that the Fourth Frontier War was the defining moment in Xhosa-colonial relations, the point at which most chiefs and commoners realized that the Europeans posed a greater threat to their political and cultural autonomy than did any other group. John Milton states that it "shocked and disheartened the Xhosa."¹⁵ Peires argues that the Fourth Frontier War was "a new and shattering experience for the Xhosa. . . . The havoc wrought by the colonial forces was not only cruel but incomprehensible."¹⁶ But was it really?

¹³ Graham to Ngqika, undated, RCC, 21:350; MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 131, 135.

¹⁴ CTG/AA, 6 Jun 1812.

¹⁵ John Milton, The Edges of War (Cape Town: Juta, 1983), 62.

¹⁶ Peires, Phalo, 66.

The British campaign was the largest and most systematic to date, but the tactics employed differed little from those of Boer commandos in earlier wars. Xhosa had fought Europeans three times before, occasionally suffering grievous losses at the hands of the commandos, and several times they had been driven across the Fish River. Boer tactics included the destruction of kraals and crops, as well as the murder of women and children. As a result of Boer commandos, the Mdange had been destroyed as a viable chiefdom, and the other small polities nearly so. Casualties suffered in the first three wars were greater than those of 1811-12. Finally, Graham, unlike the Boers or for that matter later British commanders, returned all captured cattle to their owners once hostilities ended.¹⁷

Peires also claims that Xhosa perceptions of the threat posed by the Colony had "crystallized" by 1812.¹⁸ Yet the Gcaleka chiefdom, the largest and most powerful polity among the Xhosa, still had little idea of the dangers posed by the white advance. Nor did Ngqika's followers, who still considered themselves allies of the Colony and therefore assumed -- disastrously, as it turned out -- that they would be exempted from harsh treatment at the hands of the whites. Even Ndlambe had little reason to believe that the threat posed by the Colony was permanent. Large military forces

¹⁷ Graham to Ngqika, undated, RCC, 21:350.

¹⁸ Peires, Phalo, 66.

had come and gone before. Ndlambe and the other chiefs must have believed that the British and Boer forces would disband once the fighting ended.

The chiefs were wrong, however, and it is here that Peires' analysis remains sound. England was the first country with the desire and the resources to expel all the chiefdoms from the Fish-Sundays region. Further, it was able to keep them out of the area with forts and a garrison. This, if anything, was the most "shocking" result of the war. The avenue of retreat and expansion had been blocked.

The expulsion thus set in motion a much more violent internal conflict among the Xhosa polities, as for the first time they experienced overcrowding and resource shortages. By 1812, in other words, many Xhosa had come to see the Colony as a serious, if not yet the major, threat to their autonomy. Most of the chiefdoms, however, remained more concerned about the danger they posed to one another, because the expulsion and closing of the frontier had the immediate effect of forcing them into a harsh internal war over resources and political supremacy. Nevertheless, by 1812 even the larger chiefdoms were beginning to understand just what sort of danger their European neighbors posed.

Even while the chiefs were fighting amongst themselves, their developing attitudes towards Europeans manifested themselves in the contest between Ngqika, despised as a collaborator, and Ndlambe, who led the anti-colonial

faction. As will become clear below, the coalitions headed by these chiefs must be viewed not only as a reflection of internal divisions, but also as a sign of the growing awareness that Europeans were beginning to influence Xhosa internal politics. This little-studied relationship between external and internal affairs was the means by which Xhosa attitudes towards Europeans were shaped.

The Fourth Frontier War must therefore be seen not as the defining moment in relations between black and white, but rather as one important step in the long process by which Xhosa-European relations and conflict among the chiefdoms interacted to produce a firm awareness among all Xhosa of the great danger posed by their white neighbors.

Xhosa-Colonial Relations, 1812-1817

Unrest and the Commando System

If the British thought their chain of forts would stop Xhosa movement into the Colony, they were wrong. The Fish River was a poor boundary, lined as it was with thick forest through which raiders could move in safety. Nor was it an effective physical barrier, since water levels dropped to one or two feet several times a year.¹⁹ This, combined with Xhosa anger at the expulsion and the propensity of such groups as the Mdange for raiding, made for an unstable

¹⁹ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 153-154.

situation on the frontier. Drought in 1812 made an already bad situation almost unbearable for many Xhosa.²⁰

As a result, cattle thefts increased dramatically in 1813. In the four-week period ending 20 November 1813, over 1,000 colonial cattle were taken.²¹ Also, many small parties of Gqunukhwebe, desperate for pasture, crossed the Fish River with their herds. They were, however, driven back by commandos who seized their cattle.²² Governor Cradock, reacting angrily to the unrest along his "secure" border, directed Colonel Vicars, Graham's successor, to restore order. Cradock realized, however, that excessive force would only exacerbate tensions. He thus forbade the recovery of any but colonial cattle, and cautioned against excesses such as kraal-burning and the killing of women and children. Subsequent letters confirmed these policies.²³

The resulting expedition under Captain Fraser, the first ever to cross the Fish River during peacetime for the purpose of retaking stolen cattle, seized nearly 3,000 animals, many from the Colony's "friend" Ngqika, but retained only 140 that could be identified through colonial markings. The rest were returned.²⁴

²⁰ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 155.

²¹ Vicars to Cradock, 8 Dec 1813, RCC, 9:276.

²² MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 155.

²³ Bird to Cuyler, 17 Jun 1814, RCC, 10:123.

²⁴ Vicars to Cradock, 8 Dec 1813, RCC, 9:276-277.

Though the chiefs must have disliked the Commando System, as Cradock's post-war policy was referred to, they likely viewed it as a harsh but not totally unfair instrument of justice, because the soldiers took only colonial animals and left the others.²⁵ This is borne out by the fact that cattle raiding decreased markedly after the Fraser commando, while several chiefs including Ngqika voluntarily returned horses and cattle to the settlers.²⁶ One would expect that, had the Xhosa found the commandos onerous or unjust, they would have responded by increasing their raids.

Somerset, the Reprisal System and the Road to War

Cradock's replacement by Lord Charles Somerset in 1814 initially brought no changes to British policy. Indeed, for the next two years Somerset seems to have followed closely the instructions given to him by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Bathurst:

your lordship will at once see the necessity of adhering to the line of policy which he [Cradock] has uniformly followed, and will not less carefully avoid any hostile aggression against the Kaffres than you will be

²⁵ The name "Commando System" is confusing because it evokes images of trekboer irregulars. However, this term was the one used by the British themselves in referring to the policy in force between 1812 and 1817, by which patrols of British regulars, assisted by Boer militiamen, tracked and reclaimed stolen colonial cattle. These patrols were therefore quite different from the trekboer commandos as they are generally defined in the historiography.

²⁶ Vicars to Reynell, 22 Jan 1814, RCC, 9:312; Vicars to Cradock, 21 Apr 1814, RCC, 9:493-495.

ready to repel any incursion which they may make within the limits of the Colony.²⁷

In 1815, citing the tranquil nature of the frontier, he went so far as to dismiss the Boer commandos that had been on rotating duty along the border since 1812.²⁸

Somerset, however, apparently had his own ideas about how best to administer the frontier, for when cattle raiding again increased in late 1816, a response to drought and harsh competition for resources among the chiefdoms, Somerset abruptly claimed that the Commando System was no longer working.²⁹ He did this in spite of the fact that the frontier had remained tranquil until the end of 1816, indicating that the Commando System was actually effective.

From December 1816 to January 1817, 3,600 cattle were stolen and 90 of 145 families fled Albany District, the new name for the area encompassing the Zuurveld.³⁰ In response to the unrest, Somerset decided to establish a new set of relations with the Xhosa chiefs. The man with whom he chose to negotiate, not surprisingly, was Ngqika, still viewed by the Colony as the "supreme chief."

Somerset, accompanied by over 800 soldiers and two field pieces, met Ngqika and the other chiefs at the Kat

²⁷ Bathurst to Somerset, 30 Jul 1814, RCC, 10:141.

²⁸ Somerset to Bathurst, 3 Apr 1815, RCC, 10:293.

²⁹ Somerset to Bathurst, 23 Jan 1817, RCC, 11:252-256.

³⁰ Somerset to Bathurst, 24 Apr 1817, RCC, 11:303-325.

River on 2 April 1817. His new plan for dealing with raiding was simple. Rather than rely on commandos to retake colonial cattle, he intended to make the chiefs responsible for punishing their cattle-raiding countrymen.

Somerset began by asking Ngqika if he would like to trade at Grahamstown, and to control all Xhosa trade with the whites. When Ngqika responded positively, Somerset hit him with the key demand of the Kat River Conference, stating that legal commercial relations with the Colony depended on Ngqika's willingness to accept responsibility for, and stamp out, all cattle raiding. Ngqika, realizing what was happening and knowing full well that he had little authority over other Xhosa leaders, said "there is my uncle and there are the other chiefs."

"No," said Somerset, "you must be responsible for all the cattle and the horses that are stolen."

"Say yes, that you will be responsible," the other chiefs reputedly whispered to Ngqika, nervously eyeing the soldiers, Boers and cannon that surrounded them, "for we see the man is getting angry."³¹

Ngqika agreed, in return for control over Xhosa trade with the Colony and, more important, Somerset's promises of military assistance in support of his position as "supreme

³¹ Evidence of Dyani Tshatshu, ABCO, 569.

chief" of the Xhosa.³² This gave the Colony an option to intervene in conflicts among the chiefdoms at any time.

The Reprisal System agreed to by Ngqika, which replaced the Commando System, was an unmitigated disaster. Military patrols from the Colony were now authorized to follow the "spoor" of stolen cattle to the first kraal where such a trail led, and there to take a number of cattle equal to those that the settler claimed had been lost. The abuses carried out under this system became a key cause of further warfare on the frontier.

Sir Andries Stockenstrom, the son and successor of the Landdrost killed in the Fourth Frontier War, scathingly summarized the effects of the Reprisal System. Citing one of the many raids carried out after 1817, he wrote,

a spoor being found, which in a country covered with thousands of cattle is no wonder, it is the spoor of course. Off gallops . . . the patrol, until they pounce upon a kraal. . . . Compensation having been demanded, and refused on the plea of innocence, the patrol collects the cattle belonging to the kraal. Ten fine colonial oxen were stolen, each of which was worth five of these miserable Kaffir beasts, and off . . . goes the successful patrol . . . with fifty or sixty of these beasts, telling the head man of the kraal that he must find the thief, and obtain compensation through his chief. Resistance leads to bloodshed; whether the barbarians thus plundered starve is no business of ours.³³

³² Peires, Phalo, 60-61.

³³ Andries Stockenstrom, The Autobiography of the Late Sir Andries Stockenstrom, ed. C. W. Hutton, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Juta, 1887), 1:102. For further examples of the outrages committed under the Reprisal System, see Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:103-105; and ABCO, 110-111.

Stockenstrom's account underscores the outrage felt by the Xhosa, one of whom summed up their feelings when he said "we do not care how many Caffres you shoot if they come into your country, and you catch them stealing, but for every cow you take from our country you make a thief."³⁴

The first Reprisal, in June 1817, had predictable results. A patrol seized 19 cattle from the minor chief Habana, despite the fact that they were not the same cattle that had been taken from the Colony. Habana had not attended the Kat River Conference, and even if he knew of the agreements reached there he would likely have disapproved. His warriors resisted and in the ensuing fight three soldiers were wounded, five of Habana's warriors killed and several others injured.

In a dispatch to Lord Bathurst, Somerset painted the incident in a positive light, saying that it

serve[s] to confirm me in the opinion I had formed of the efficacy of the measures of policy and defence which I adopted when on the spot, and to prove to me that a perseverance in them will in all probability be crowned with the desirable effect of giving tranquillity to our long disturbed border.³⁵

Somerset, however, had completely misread the Xhosa. Certain that such "savages" only understood force, he failed to recognize that the Xhosa had an intricate legal process as

³⁴ Quoted in ABCO, 83.

³⁵ Somerset to Bathurst, 23 Jun 1817, RCC, 11:357-358.

well as firm ideas about justice.³⁶ From its inception, the Reprisal System convinced the chiefs that the English intended to involve themselves directly in their internal affairs, bypassing them and punishing whichever Xhosa they saw fit in order to recoup their livestock losses. Rather than submit to such an insult, several chiefs ordered their followers to strike back. Raiding parties stole hundreds of cattle in an effort to rebuild depleted herds. As the number of Reprisals and counter-raids grew, the frontier became destabilized.³⁷ Most Xhosa were becoming aware that whites were not content to take their land; now it seemed as though the Colony was holding them subject to an alien and unjust law that punished the innocent for the guilty and left the Xhosa to starve.

A Reprisal in January 1818 marked the point at which another war became inevitable. So unstable had the situation become by late 1817 that one settler wrote "we are again plunged into the greatest misery, we have no rest either night or day on account of the Kaffirs."³⁸ Somerset, now uncomfortably aware of the situation, directed that a major Reprisal be undertaken against Ndlambe who was, as usual, unjustly blamed for the increase in thefts.

³⁶ John Maclean, ed., A Compendium of Kafir Laws and Customs (Grahamstown: J. Slater, 1906; reprint, London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 67-70, 115-117.

³⁷ Somerset to Bathurst, 12 Nov 1817, RCC, 11:403.

³⁸ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 177.

The British force moved towards Ndlambe's village on 8 January, but by the time it arrived the cattle had been driven off. Only Ndlambe and his warriors remained, quickly surrounding the colonial troops and forcing them to withdraw. Not wanting to leave emptyhanded, the commander, Major Fraser, moved north to Ngqika's country, seizing 2,060 cattle from him and his allies. Ngqika, promised friendship and protection by the Colony, was moved to ask "how is that, that I have now been attacked and my people killed?"³⁹

Ngqika, in reality a weak ruler since his defeat at the hands of Ndlambe in 1807, was already too dependent upon the Colony to retaliate. But his allies, including the minor chiefs of the Mdange, Ntinde, Mbalu and Gwali, were unwilling to sit still. When they demanded that Ngqika lead them on a raid to recoup their losses, he equivocated, and his allies promptly defected to Ndlambe, throwing the balance of power between the two overwhelmingly to the latter's side.

Ndlambe then attacked and defeated Ngqika in an epic battle at Amalinde, while Ngqika, begging for colonial intervention, convinced Somerset to send a large force to his assistance. This marked the beginning of the Fifth Frontier War (1818-19), a conflict brought on by colonial involvement in Xhosa internal affairs. It was during this war that all members of the various chiefdoms, whose differing views on whites had been developing gradually over the

³⁹ Evidence of Dyani Tshatshu, ABCO, 569.

course of five decades, realized with finality that whites posed a grave threat to their continued political and cultural independence. Prior to an analysis of the war, however, it is necessary to look at how conflicts among the chiefdoms after 1812 interacted with colonial policies in shaping Xhosa responses to European encroachment.

Increasing Conflict among the Xhosa, 1812-1818

Competition for Resources

As a result of the expulsions in 1812, the westernmost chiefdoms were for the first time faced with a shortage of land and, therefore, pasture. Worse, the escape hatch to the west had closed, prohibiting movement in that direction. The removal of over 20,000 men, women and children to the area east of the Fish River placed an unprecedented strain upon Xhosa society and forced a showdown that for years had been forestalled by the retreat of small chiefdoms to the west, as well as by colonial weakness prior to 1806.

The struggle between Ndlambe and Ngqika was in part a response to the physical stresses generated by the 1812 expulsions. It was also a reaction to increasing colonial influence over Xhosa internal affairs, particularly through the person of Ngqika. In the wake of the Fourth Frontier War, the small chiefdoms gradually shifted their loyalties to Ndlambe or Ngqika. By 1818, a situation existed in which two coalitions, led by old enemies with competing claims to

productive resources and different ideas about the proper role of whites in Xhosa politics, determined to gain supremacy over the area between the Fish and Kei Rivers.

In order to understand the increasing internal strife among the chiefdoms, and the manner in which it related to Xhosa-colonial relations, one must look first at the effects of increasing population pressure and decreasing resources. In 1809 Colonel Collins estimated that 40,000 Xhosa lived between the Sundays and Mbashe Rivers, with Hintsa's Gcaleka comprising 10,000 of the total.⁴⁰ In 1824, after the expulsion over the Fish and the further loss of the area between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers as a result of the Fifth Frontier War, Thompson placed the total number of Xhosa at 100,000, over twice the number given by Collins.⁴¹ It is, however, important to note that while the Xhosa lost the Fish-Keiskamma area in 1819, certain "friendly" chiefdoms were allowed to reside in it conditionally until 1846. These statistics, although rough, nevertheless underscore the fact that a major population increase had occurred by 1824.

⁴⁰ Richard Collins, "Journal of a Tour to the North-Eastern Boundary, the Orange River, and the Storm Mountains," in The Record, ed. Donald Moodie (Cape Town: Balkema, 1960), 8.

⁴¹ George Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa, 2 vols. (London: Black, 1827; reprint, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1967-1968), 1:196.

The area from the Sundays to the Mbashe comprises roughly 15,000 square miles, meaning that in 1809 the average population density would have been about 2.7 per square mile, a reasonable figure for a people who relied heavily on extensive stock herding. By 1824, the Xhosa were living in an 11,000 square-mile area between the Fish and the Mbashe, with an average of roughly 9.1 people per square mile. The population density in 1818, at the time of the Battle of Amalinde, must have been somewhere between these two figures, but closer to the latter.⁴²

The significance of such a change becomes clear when an analysis of Xhosa land-use patterns is undertaken. Recent studies of pastoralism in grassland areas of eastern and southern Africa indicate that stock raising can support a maximum of around 10 people per square mile.⁴³ "If this figure is exceeded," one study asserts,

then the humans, all of whom must try to maintain a minimum number of stock, will inevitably overgraze their land through their livestock, and are certain to destroy their own environment in time. If that happens, the situation further deteriorates because, firstly, the carrying capacity of the range is reduced

⁴² Calculations are based upon population estimates and a determination of area in square miles as taken from J. S. Bergh and J. C. Visagie, The Eastern Cape Frontier Zone 1660-1980: A Cartographic Guide for Historical Research (Durban: Butterworths, 1985), 17.

⁴³ D. J. Pratt and M. D. Gwynne, eds. Rangeland Management and Ecology in East Africa (New York: Krieger, 1977), 38.

and, secondly, the individual performance of underfed animals decreases.⁴⁴

This became a serious consideration along the Eastern Frontier, where only limited areas of mixed and sweet veld existed. Expulsion from the Fish-Sundays region exacerbated the problem, because the disruption of Xhosa transhumance patterns led to intensive land use and eventual overgrazing. This crisis did not become severe until after the Seventh Frontier War (1846-47), but it was serious enough in 1818 to help bring about the clash at Amalinde.⁴⁵ Ndlambe's chief councilor stated that the battle occurred because "we quarreled with Gaika [Nggika] about grass. . . ."⁴⁶

Further, the Xhosa had always relied upon extensive land use patterns in providing the necessary protein for their diets. Most protein, it will be recalled, came from milk, thus the need for large herds and adequate areas of pasture. A large part of the diet, however, was made up of wild game, which along with agriculture provided the balance of Xhosa nutrition. Andries Stockenstrom, who accompanied Colonel Collins on his journey among the Xhosa in 1809, noted that huge expanses of unoccupied and fertile territory existed between the various chiefdoms, "the country between

⁴⁴ Pratt and Gwynne, Rangeland Management, 38.

⁴⁵ For an excellent look at the later effects of land losses on the Xhosa, see Peires, Phalo, 161-163.

⁴⁶ John Pringle, Narrative of a Residence in South Africa (London: Moxon, 1835; reprint, Cape Town: Struik, 1966), 286.

the Kei and Buffalo," for instance, "being kept vacant as a hunting-grounds between the Ama Galeka [Gcaleka or eastern Xhosa] and Ama Ranabe [Rharhabe or western Xhosa]."⁴⁷

Similarly, he claimed that prior to the 1812 expulsion, "the territory between the [Bushmans River] and the Fish River was, according to Kaffir custom, left free for the game to accumulate and to be hunted."⁴⁸

While such buffer zones probably existed for political as well as economic reasons, Stockenstrom was likely correct in referring to them as areas that were left uninhabited by mutual consent and in order to procure nutritious wild game. With this in mind, it becomes clear that a large increase in population density must have been traumatic for the Xhosa. Inadequate grazing areas meant that malnourished cows produced less milk, while the loss of the Fish-Sundays region deprived the westernmost chiefdoms of their prime hunting grounds. Both led to poorer nutrition and, ultimately, increasing internal conflict among the Xhosa polities.

Ngqika, Ndlambe and the Anti-Colonial Coalition

To this increasing shortage of resources was added the bitterness most Xhosa felt towards Ngqika for his continued alliance with the Colony. After the 1812 expulsion, Ngqika sent messengers to Colonel Graham, asking if his position of

⁴⁷ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:41.

⁴⁸ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:46.

strict neutrality had met with Graham's approval, and whether or not the Colony still considered him to be the greatest of the Xhosa chiefs. Graham responded by saying that Ngqika "is certainly the greatest Kaffir chief. . . ."⁴⁹ That the British clearly knew this was not true did not matter. They had discovered that Ngqika was a useful tool with which to influence Xhosa internal affairs: weakened as Ngqika was by the Thuthula affair, he was only too happy to collaborate with the whites.⁵⁰ Somerset confirmed this view of Ngqika when he wrote to Lord Bathurst that

[as] the authority of [Ngqika], long considered to be principal [Xhosa] chief, had been for some time on the decline . . . I availed myself of this circumstance, and by adopting a line calculated to give him weight with the whole [Xhosa] people I trust I have made it his interest to adopt my views.⁵¹

Nor was Somerset the only one with a clear idea of the situation. The other chiefdoms realized what was happening and resolved to put an end to the increasing colonial influence over their political dealings.

Of all the chiefs, only a few of the weakest ones allied themselves with Ngqika after 1807. Realizing that Ngqika was on good terms with the Colony, the Mdange, as well as other chiefdoms that had been fragmented and rendered hostile to the Europeans by the first four frontier

⁴⁹ Graham to Ngqika, undated, RCC, 21:350.

⁵⁰ For Thuthula, see chapter 3, n. 90.

⁵¹ Somerset to Bathurst, 24 Apr 1817, RCC, 11:306.

wars, entered into agreements with the "supreme chief" whereby he received a share of the cattle they stole in return for protection. The minor chiefs therefore had no real loyalty to Ngqika; for all concerned it was an alliance of convenience and one upon which Ngqika could not rely.⁵²

With the Reprisal System, the chiefs opposed to Ngqika became increasingly angry as colonial patrols took their cattle in place of animals that had been stolen by Ngqika's allies. As Ngqika shielded the raiders and pretended the greatest friendship for the Colony, the other Xhosa were plundered of their wealth and means of subsistence. This sparked the anti-Ngqika coalition headed by Ndlambe. With the defection of the minor chiefs after the January 1818 commando, Ndlambe finally had the strength to crush Ngqika.

The severe internal conflict that culminated in the Battle of Amalinde was thus a product of the interaction among three factors: an increasing competition for resources caused by land losses and population growth; the growing threat posed by the Cape Colony, as manifested in the 1812 expulsion, the Reprisal System and the "friendship" with Ngqika; and the enmity between two coalitions that competed for resources and held opposing positions on the growing colonial involvement in Xhosa internal affairs.

⁵² J. B. Peires, "Ngqika," in Black Leaders in Southern African History, ed. Christopher Saunders (London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., 1979), 24; Peires, Phalo, 60, 80.

The Role of Hintsa

Two other factors also contributed significantly to the showdown between Ndlambe and Ngqika. The first was the resurgence of the paramountcy under Hintsa. Captured by Ngqika in 1795 while attempting to aid Ndlambe, Hintsa never forgot the humiliation that he, the paramount chief of all the Xhosa, had suffered as a result of this defeat. Gradually, Hintsa rebuilt his power base. By 1818, he was again a powerful chief, rivalling Ndlambe and far exceeding Ngqika in terms of his following.⁵³

As the conflict among the western Xhosa escalated, Hintsa saw a chance to extend his authority over the chiefs to his west. Recognizing Ndlambe as the leader of all the western polities, Hintsa led his warriors to fight at Amalinde. In fact, it is reported that he led the allied armies against Ngqika in person.⁵⁴

The Rise of Nxele

The other major factor that hastened the Battle of Amalinde was the rise of the prophet Nxele. His role in the events of 1818 has been seen as a response to the stresses brought on by increasing white control over Xhosa internal relations.⁵⁵ As Peires argues, the Xhosa needed

⁵³ Peires, Phalo, 62-63.

⁵⁴ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:115.

⁵⁵ Peires, Phalo, 66-71.

some sort of a religious synthesis . . . which was firmly rooted in the traditional world-view (which was still seen to work from day to day), but which was capable of explaining the presence of these strange people and suggesting a means of controlling them.⁵⁶

From an early age, Nxele showed an intense interest in Christianity, spending many days at Grahamstown, the new frontier military headquarters, discussing theology with Mr. Van der Lingen, the chaplain of the Cape Regiment.⁵⁷ His discussions with the minister apparently had a huge influence on Nxele, because by 1816 he was preaching to virtually all of the chiefdoms.

Nxele's early preaching fell on deaf ears, as the young prophet told the people to reject witchcraft and bloodshed, for which God was punishing the Xhosa. He further attacked institutions such as polygyny. Not surprisingly, most Xhosa had little use for a religion that condemned their central beliefs at the very time when they most needed to believe in them, and until 1816 Nxele's cries fell on deaf ears.⁵⁸

Sometime in that year, however, Ndlambe took Nxele under his protection, and shortly thereafter his preaching acquired a strong anti-colonial flavor. Relying on his knowledge of Christian belief, particularly the creation, the fall of man, the atonement and the resurrection, he developed a new spiritual message that combined Christian,

⁵⁶ Peires, Phalo, 68-69.

⁵⁷ Peires, Phalo, 69.

⁵⁸ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 187.

traditional and personal aspects. He now preached that the world was a battleground between Thixo, the God of the whites, and Mdalidiphu, the God of the blacks. The whites had killed the son of their God, and had been punished with expulsion from their own country into the sea, from which they had emerged to take Xhosa lands. He promised, however, that Mdalidiphu would help them to defeat the whites.⁵⁹

This message had a huge impact on the western Xhosa, increasing Nxele's--as well as Ndlambe's--power. Nxele harangued the Xhosa about the need to resist the whites:

Here they come! They have crossed the Qagqiwa [Swartskop] and they have crossed the Nqweba [Sundays]; only one river more, the Nxuba [Fish] and then they will be in our land. What will become of you then? Let us combine, and be one powerful nation, that we may drive the Umlungu [whites] into the sea.⁶⁰

Viewed in retrospect, it is no surprise that Nxele rose to prominence as the Xhosa searched for an explanation of the white presence and for the means by which they could counter it. Internal and external stresses had led by 1818 to a point at which the western Xhosa needed some indication that powers greater than their own were involved in the fight against the English and their ally Ngqika. Thus, the rise of Nxele was particularly significant in two respects. To begin with, it marked the point at which most Xhosa began to think of relationships along the frontier in racial

⁵⁹ Peires, Phalo, 71.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Peires, Phalo, 66.

terms: whites were now seen as the most dangerous enemies of virtually all the chiefdoms. Also, Nxele was the first leader to forge a broad-based alliance among chiefdoms that had in many cases been enemies for years. The rise of Nxele, therefore, marked the point at which the Xhosa began to develop a significant measure of political unity in response to white encroachment.

Amalinde and the Fifth Frontier War, 1818-1819

The Climax of Xhosa Internal Conflict

Ngqika was severely weakened when, after the desertion of the minor chiefs, his ally Mdushane, Ndlambe's estranged son and Ngqika's boyhood friend, sought a reconciliation with his father.⁶¹ The balance of power between the two chiefs shifted radically as a result, and by October 1818 Ndlambe was ready to engage his nephew in battle. He forced the issue by taking a large number of Ngqika's cattle.⁶²

Ndlambe's coalition was by far the greatest ever assembled by the Xhosa for the purposes of internal warfare. Traditionally, wars were minor affairs, with perhaps a few hundred men engaged on each side. For this effort, the Gcaleka, Ndlambe, Gqunukhwebe, Mbalu, Ntinde, Gwali and Mdange were all arrayed against Ngqika, who found himself

⁶¹ John H. Soga, The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1930), 150.

⁶² Peires, Phalo, 63.

alone. No estimate exists for the size of the allied army, but it was probably larger than that led by Nxele against Grahamstown a few months later, which has been quoted by eyewitnesses as having been between 5,000 and 10,000 strong.⁶³ Ngqika probably had no more than 2,000 warriors. He did, however, have his "friends" in the Cape Colony, who were destined to play a central role in the conflict.

Of all the Xhosa in Ndlambe's huge alliance, only the Gcaleka, who had not as yet suffered defeat at the hands of the Colony, were still largely unconcerned about the colonial presence. For the rest, who had experienced the wrath of the whites, war against Ngqika represented a visceral rejection of that chief's alliance with the Colony and all that it portended for the Xhosa people. Quite simply, the Xhosa, with the notable exceptions of Hintsa and Ngqika, now realized that any effort to end colonial influence over Xhosa internal affairs had to begin with the utter defeat of Ngqika, the man who had become the symbol and focus of collaboration with the Europeans. With this knowledge firmly in mind, the great army took the field.

Ngqika's forces were led into battle by his right-hand son Maqoma, destined to become a great general and an enemy of the British. Maqoma's force marched to a plain known as

⁶³ Colonel Willshire placed the number at 9,000; Major Fraser claims that there were only about 5,000 warriors. See M. King, "the Battle of Grahamstown," in the Annals of the Grahamstown Historical Society, 1980, 29.

Amalinde.⁶⁴ Seeing what appeared to be a small force of Ndlambe's men arrayed before him, Maqoma ordered an attack. Ndlambe's warriors gave way, drawing the Ngqika after them. Then, the bulk of Ndlambe's army, concealed along the edges of the battlefield, struck Maqoma's warriors in the flanks. Maqoma was carried from the field severely wounded and shortly thereafter his warriors broke and ran, sealing Ngqika's defeat at the hands of Ndlambe's alliance.⁶⁵

The aftermath of the battle proved that Xhosa society had been fundamentally altered by the internal and external stresses that it had undergone. On the battlefield, Ndlambe's warriors built huge bonfires and by their light methodically killed all the Ngqika wounded that they found. Over 300 of Ngqika's men, and nearly as many of Ndlambe's, were killed in the battle and its aftermath, a huge number by Xhosa standards. The victors pursued Ngqika's few remaining followers, burning their kraals, plundering grain pits and seizing 6,000 cattle.⁶⁶ Never before had war among the Xhosa been so vicious. Growing colonial control over Xhosa politics and increasing resource scarcity had combined to transform the nature of Xhosa warfare.

⁶⁴ Milton, Edges of War, 68.

⁶⁵ Milton, Edges of War, 68.

⁶⁶ CTG/AA, 2 Jan 1819.

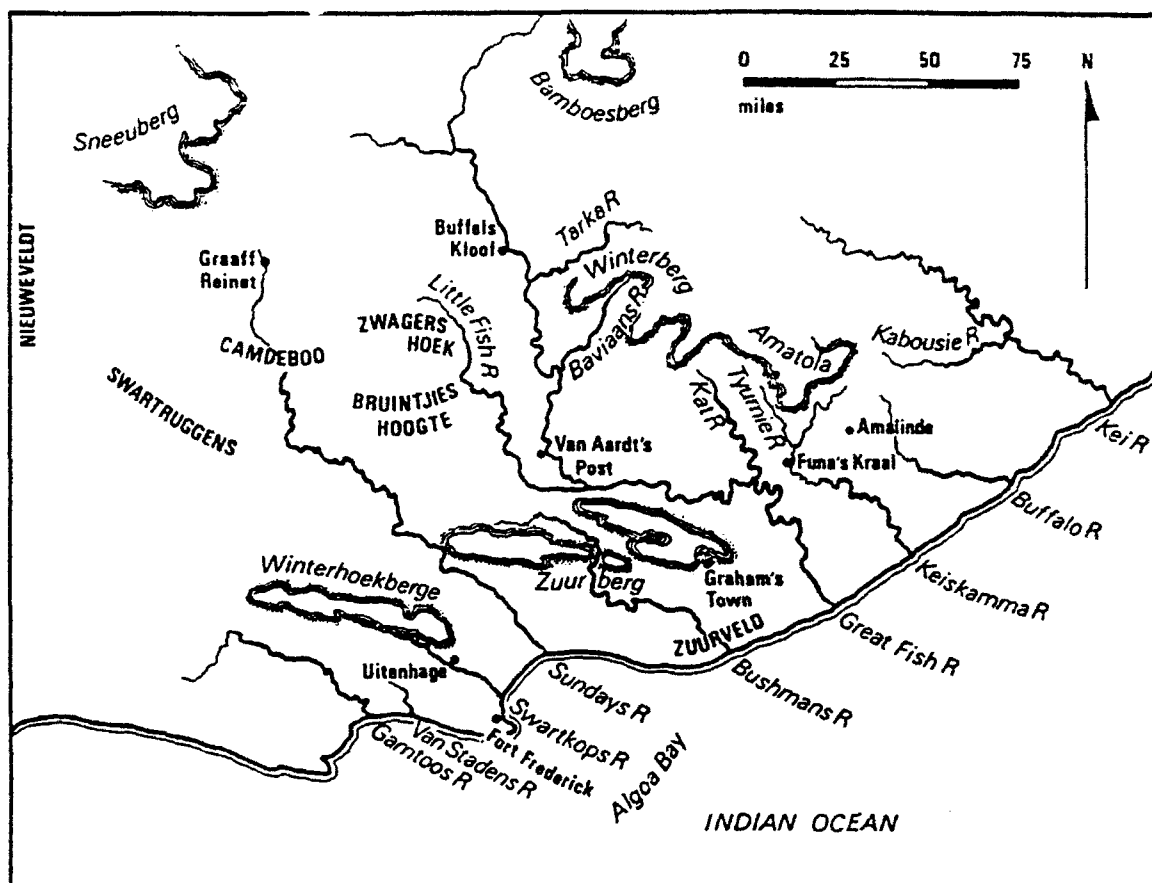


Figure 4-2. Amalinde, Grahamstown and the Eastern Frontier.

Source: Ben MacLennan, A Proper Degree of Terror (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), Map 3, 201.

Amalinde is remembered as a place in which the very fabric of Xhosa society was strained to the limit.⁶⁷

In late 1818, therefore, it appeared as though the long conflict between Ndlambe and Ngqika was over. The allies had won a resounding victory, and Ngqika was forced to flee with a few followers to the Winterberg. The beaten chief, however, had one last and desperate card to play. Sending word of his defeat to Governor Somerset, Ngqika begged for colonial intervention against his uncle.

The Colonial Response to Amalinde

Despite an urgent message from Ndlambe, stating that the war was an internal affair and that he wanted only peace with the Colony, Somerset chose to believe that Ngqika had been punished by the allied chiefdoms for his efforts to stop cattle raiding, though this was clearly not true.⁶⁸ Taking advantage of the opportunity to further increase colonial influence over the chiefs, Somerset directed Colonel Brereton to revenge Ngqika and restore him to his rightful place as the "supreme chief." His orders further stated that "the object you are to bear in view is the future tranquillity of this border."⁶⁹ Brereton, however, badly

⁶⁷ Milton, Edges of War, 69.

⁶⁸ Peires, Phalo, 63.

⁶⁹ Rogers to Brereton, 1 Nov 1818, RCC, 12:52-55.

mismanaged the campaign, and the result was a war more destructive than any previously seen by the Colony.

In early December, Brereton led a large force over the Fish and, joined by the surviving Ngqika, burned kraals, shot every Xhosa that he found and seized 23,000 cattle. Ndlambe, well aware of colonial firepower, chose to avoid combat. Unable to run Ndlambe down, Brereton simply went home, reinstating Ngqika on his old lands and giving him 9,000 of the captured cattle. The rest he divided among his soldiers or sold to defray the cost of the expedition.⁷⁰ Brereton himself knew that he had failed effectively to chastise Ndlambe. In a nervous letter to Stockenstrom, he warned of the need for the "utmost vigilance to be observed along your border for some time to come," fearing that Ndlambe's followers, "who have been so greatly punished may attempt an incursion into the colony."⁷¹

The commando must have come as an immense shock to Ndlambe and his allies, certain as they were that the war with Ngqika was no business of the whites. They had sent assurances of friendship to Somerset and refrained from pursuing Ngqika into the Colony, where he briefly took refuge. Yet they were unjustly attacked and severely punished. Their grievous cattle losses, combined with another

⁷⁰ Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 278; CTG/AA, 2 Jan 1819.

⁷¹ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 179.

drought, threatened them with starvation. Enraged by the actions of the Colony, Ndlambe and his allies struck back.

The Xhosa Counterattack

Ngqika was again defeated and forced to fly.⁷² The allies then turned to the Colony. By January 1819, farms were being burnt and Europeans killed as far away as Algoa Bay. Many settlers fled from the Zuurveld and virtually all of the cattle in the region were taken. But even here Ndlambe's warriors showed restraint. "In these attacks," said one observer,

the Caffers showed a determined resolution to recover their cattle; yet, although they killed many of the soldiers and colonists, they did not evince that blood-thirsty disposition which is common to most barbarians. When they could get the cattle away without being opposed, they made no attempt on the lives of the inhabitants.⁷³

When it appeared that they could not escape with their cattle from pursuing commandos, Ndlambe's followers killed the animals rather than allow them to be taken by the whites a second time.⁷⁴ This act alone demonstrates the degree of bitterness that most Xhosa had finally begun to feel for the Colony. To kill cattle on any but ceremonial occasions was

⁷² MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 179.

⁷³ John Brownlee, "Account of the Amakosae, or Southern Caffres," in George Thompson, Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa, 2 vols. (London: Black, 1827; reprint: Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1967-1968), 2:345.

⁷⁴ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 180.

extremely rare, as they were so venerated and so important to Xhosa society.

Colonial parties attempting to run down the raiders soon discovered the ferocity with which the Xhosa resisted any attempts to take their animals a second time. Andries Stockenstrom, writing to the colonial secretary, spoke of this while condemning British policy:

How many lives have been lost since the last Commando? What determined and successful attempts upon our armed parties have not lately been made up by a race who formerly fled at the sight of a musket? And what else could be expected from a populous tribe driven to desperation by being deprived of all their cattle, their only means of subsistence; left to choose between starvation and retaliation?⁷⁵

As the crisis deepened, Somerset wrote a series of letters to Bathurst that made things appear under control. He said that Ngqika had "10,000 fighting men," claiming that the British and their ally could easily defeat "the few tribes which are inimical to us."⁷⁶

In reality, Somerset became so desperate that he actually ordered Brereton to seize Ndlambe and kill him if he resisted.⁷⁷ Brereton, however, was not in a position to do any such thing, paralysed as he was by the many raiders then active in the frontier districts. Somerset thus replaced Brereton with Colonel Thomas Willshire, sending him to the

⁷⁵ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:143.

⁷⁶ Somerset to Bathurst, 22 May 1819, RCC, 12:198, 200.

⁷⁷ Rogers to Brereton, 12 Feb 1819, RCC, 12:138-139.

frontier together with a regiment of British regulars and directions to restore order.⁷⁸ Somerset had at his disposal 3,315 men, by far the largest colonial force ever assembled on the frontier.⁷⁹ The drought, however, prevented him from acting as rapidly as he had hoped, forage for the horses being almost nonexistent.⁸⁰

Willshire's offensive was further delayed by a huge Xhosa attack on Grahamstown in April 1819, involving between 5,000 and 10,000 warriors. This assault was quite out of character with earlier operations and represented a major escalation in the conflict. Why did the Xhosa choose to launch a daylight attack on a town defended by British regulars and cannon, when they had earlier gone to great lengths to avoid engagements with such forces? The answer lies in the successes of the previous three months and, more importantly, in Nxele's growing influence over the Xhosa.

Ndlambe's victory over Ngqika, which was likely attributed by many Xhosa to Nxele's spiritual guidance, convinced them that all who allied with the whites, as well as the whites themselves, would be defeated and expelled as Nxele had promised.⁸¹ Colonial inaction from January to April must also have convinced them that Nxele's doctoring had

⁷⁸ CTG/AA, 6 Mar 1819.

⁷⁹ MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 184.

⁸⁰ Somerset to Bathurst, 22 May 1819, RCC, 12:197.

⁸¹ Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 280-281.

effectively "tied up" the weapons of the Europeans.⁸²

Further, Nxele apparently convinced his followers that the appointed time for the decisive battle had arrived:

Grahamstown would be the site at which the expulsion of the whites from Xhosa lands would begin.

As it was, however, Ndlambe's army suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the British, losing between 500 and 1,500 killed as they repeatedly and vainly threw themselves at the well-armed soldiers.⁸³ Before the battle, Nxele had performed the wardoor ceremony, "tying up" the British firearms and promising his followers that they would shoot only hot water. The warriors were severely shaken when they found that the muskets and cannon still fired lead.

The Willshire Campaign

Colonel Willshire gave Ndlambe little time to recover from his defeat. Ensuring that Grahamstown was properly fortified prior to his departure, he took the field on 28 July 1819. The campaign he waged against Ndlambe made the 1812 expulsions pale in comparison. Dividing his force into three columns, Willshire destroyed every kraal and corn pit in his path, shot every Xhosa he could find and seized

⁸² Peires, Phalo, 136, 143-144; Stockenstrom, Auto-biography, 1:124.

⁸³ Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 281-283; MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 191-197.

thousands of cattle. Accompanying Willshire in the center column were Ngqika and his remaining 600 warriors.⁸⁴

Ndlambe, doubly cautious after the engagement at Grahamstown, in which he lost three sons, refused to fight the British troops, retiring towards the Keiskamma River.⁸⁵ Several of his minor allies, however, remained in the Fish River bush. There, many were killed by Stockenstrom's burghers, who composed the northernmost of the three columns. The survivors fled towards the Keiskamma, having lost all of their cattle. Stockenstrom himself said of the Xhosa that "great numbers of them were shot, and the extent of their distress was more than I can describe."⁸⁶

On 16 August Nxele surrendered himself to Stockenstrom with the words "people say that I have occasioned the war. Let me see whether my delivering myself up to the conquerors will restore peace to my country."⁸⁷ However, his surrender did not end the fighting. Nxele was exiled to Robben Island and drowned the next year while attempting to escape.

Willshire doggedly pursued the fleeing Xhosa, crossing the Buffalo River on 14 September and approaching the Kei a

⁸⁴ CTG/AA, 28 Aug 1819; MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 204.

⁸⁵ Somerset to Bathurst, 22 May 1819, RCC, 12:198-200; MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 206.

⁸⁶ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:153.

⁸⁷ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 208.

few days later.⁸⁸ On the 16th, Stockenstrom caught up with Ndlambe. In the ensuing fight nearly 100 warriors were killed and 7,000 cattle seized. Stockenstrom held that it was "necessary to push him to the extreme, and convince him that he was safe nowhere."⁸⁹ Ndlambe fled with the remnants of his following into rough country beyond the Kei River, out of Stockenstrom's reach. Years later, Ndlambe would complain bitterly that he had been "hunted like a spring bok" by the colonial forces.⁹⁰

While pursuing Ndlambe, Stockenstrom's men mistakenly attacked several Gcaleka villages, killing several people, burning huts and seizing cattle. Hintsa, nominally neutral but having granted refuge to Ndlambe and his allies, watched with alarm as Willshire's army advanced. Never before had such a force threatened the Gcaleka. Now, with the assault on his outlying kraals, it appeared as though the paramount himself was about to be attacked by the Colony.⁹¹

Hintsa, though frightened, agreed to meet with Colonel Willshire, who warned him against further hostility towards Ngqika, and threatened military action if he continued to shelter Ndlambe's followers. Hintsa promised to abide by Willshire's demands. Much to his relief, the colonial

⁸⁸ CTG/AA, 18 Sep 1819.

⁸⁹ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:155.

⁹⁰ Quoted in ABCO, 92.

⁹¹ Stockenstrom, Autobiography, 1:155.

forces then retired, taking 30,000 cattle with them, most of which had belonged to Ndlambe's followers.⁹² With the meeting between Willshire and Hintsa, the war ended. A few weeks later, Colonel Willshire declared that

the Kaffirs are now convinced that no bush can save them from punishment, when a commando enters their country. This is proved to Ngqika and Hintsa, as well as Ndlambe, and will, I trust, teach them to value the friendship of the Colony.⁹³

Just before the end of the war, Ndlambe's chief counselor sought a parley with Colonel Willshire. His words, noted by Andries Stockenstrom, so eloquently summarized Xhosa feelings about European involvement in their internal affairs, and about the contempt in which they held Ngqika, that they are worth quoting at length:

The war, British chiefs, is an unjust one; for you are striving to extirpate a people whom you forced to take up arms. . . . We quarrelled with Gaika about grass -- no business of yours. You sent a commando -- you took our last cow -- you left only a few calves, which died for want, along with our children. You gave half the spoil to Gaika; half you kept yourselves. Without milk, our corn destroyed, we saw our wives and children perish -- we saw that we ourselves must perish; we followed, therefore, the tracks of our cattle into the colony. We plundered, and we fought for our lives. We found you weak; we destroyed your soldiers. We saw that we were strong; we attacked your head-quarters. And if we had succeeded, our right was good, for you began the war. We failed -- and you are here. We wish for peace. . . . But your troops cover the plains, and swarm in the thickets, where they cannot distinguish the man from the woman, and shoot all. You want us to submit to Gaika. That man's face is fair to you, but his heart is false. Leave him to himself. Make peace with us. Let him fight for himself -- and we shall not

⁹² CTG/AA, 23 Oct 1819.

⁹³ Quoted in MacLennan, Proper Degree of Terror, 217.

call on you for help. . . . But if you will still make war, you may indeed kill the last man of us -- but Gaika shall not rule over the followers of those who think him a woman.⁹⁴

The stirring plea, however, fell on deaf ears.

The Price of Collaboration

In the collaborator's camp, Ngqika and his followers were jubilant. Their allegiance to the Colony, it seemed, had paid off handsomely. They were, however, about to be cruelly disappointed. Governor Somerset arrived on the frontier in October 1819, demanding an immediate conference with Ngqika. The chief appeared as requested, and was shocked to learn that as the price for British assistance he was to have 3,000 square miles of his choicest land taken away. The area between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers was to be turned into a Neutral Territory, within which neither white nor Xhosa would be allowed to settle. It was necessary, said Somerset, because the Fish River had proved a poor barrier. With the addition of this territory to the Colony, and the construction of military posts therein, English soldiers would be better able to limit Xhosa depredations. The stunned Ngqika later lamented that "when I look at the large extent of fine country that has been taken from me, I am compelled to say that, though protected, I am rather oppressed by my protectors!"⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Quoted in Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 285-287.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Pringle, Narrative of a Residence, 289.

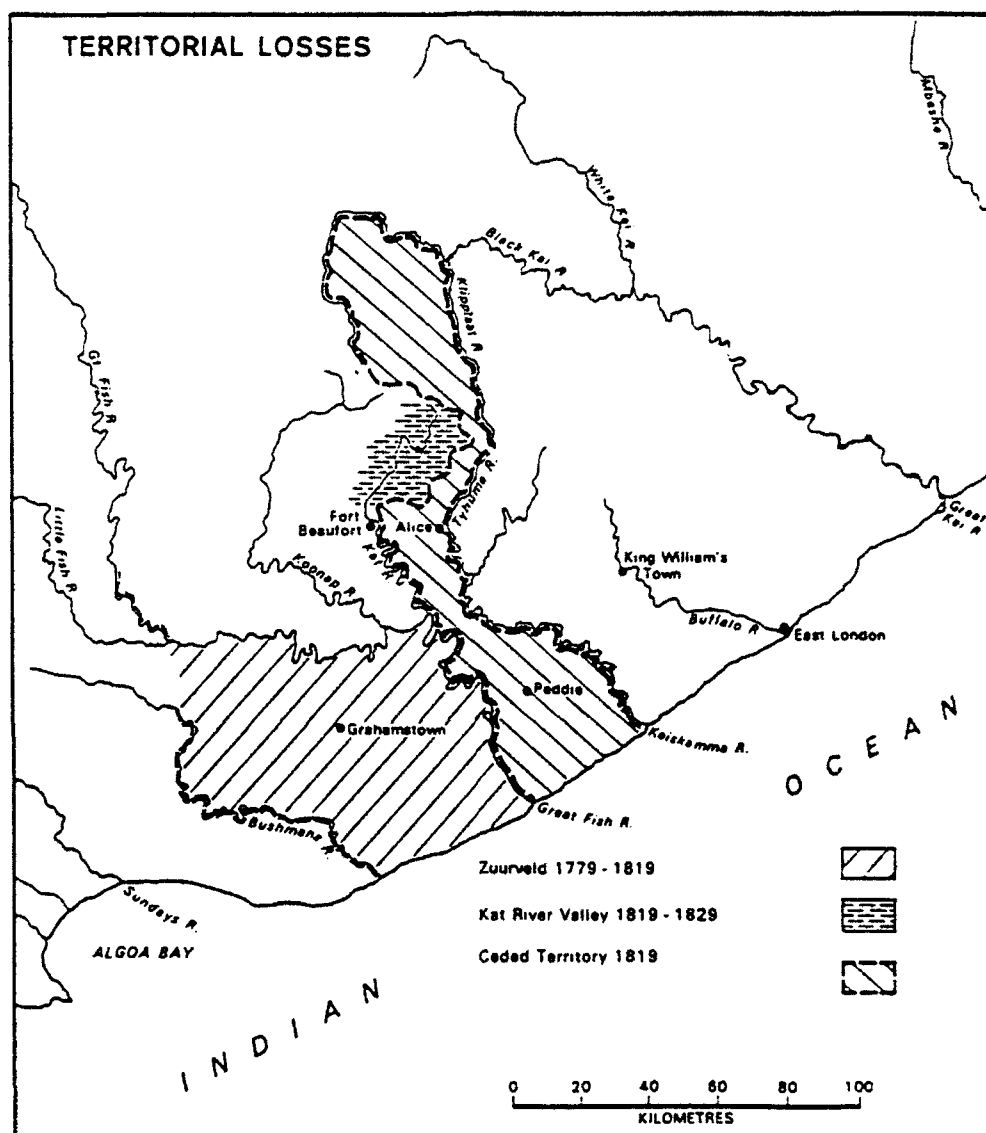


Figure 4-3. Territorial Losses, 1811-1819.

Source: J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Map 5, 162.

Somerset's letters to Lord Bathurst clearly indicate that he took full advantage of Ngqika's weakness, and that he further intended to settle Europeans upon the Neutral Territory despite assurances to the contrary. "The friendly chief Gaika," he wrote during the meeting with the chief,

is already at Lieutenant Colonel Willshire's headquarters, and it is of great exigence that his present friendly feelings towards the Government should be taken advantage of for securing the permanent interest of his majesty's settlement.⁹⁶

Further, he contradicted his earlier assurances to Ngqika that the Neutral Territory would remain vacant:

the country thus ceded is as fine a portion of ground as is to be found in any part of the world, and together with the . . . lands in the Zuurveld might perhaps be worthy of your Lordship's consideration, with the view of systematic colonization. . . .⁹⁷

The Significance of the Crucial Decade

By 1819 all the Xhosa polities, including the Gcaleka and Ngqika chiefdoms, had come to realize that Europeans posed the greatest threat to their political and cultural autonomy. The process by which this occurred began with the First Frontier War in 1779 and matured with the Fifth Frontier War in 1819. The smaller chiefdoms had learned early about the danger posed by the whites, while Ndlambe began to understand in 1812. But it was the period from 1817 to 1819

⁹⁶ Somerset to Bathurst, 24 Sep 1819, RCC, 12:321-322.

⁹⁷ Somerset to Bathurst, 15 Oct 1819, RCC, 12:339. The emphasis is added to indicate that Somerset never intended to abide by the terms of the treaty.

that brought home to all Xhosa with great force the perfidious and dangerous nature of their white neighbors.

The Colony's dogged refusal to recognize the political authority of any chief other than Ngqika, and the outrages perpetrated as a result of the Reprisal System, further convinced the Xhosa that they needed to beware of the colonial presence. Colonial intervention in Xhosa internal conflicts after Amalinde, and Colonel Willshire's devastating campaign, completed the process. At this point even the Gcaleka understood how vulnerable they had become to coercion by the Colony.

With the October 1819 treaty, Ngqika's sons Maqoma and Tyhali saw their lands taken away from them by people whom they had thought to be their friends and allies. The sons of Ngqika would, ironically, become the greatest enemies of the British, leading the Xhosa chiefdoms in three massive and disastrous wars against the Colony. Thus by 1819, the Ngqika Xhosa too saw clearly the threat posed by white involvement in Xhosa affairs, and although Ngqika lacked the resolve to fight against it, his heirs did not.

Yet the period from 1813 to 1820 has received relatively little attention from scholars, most of whom have concentrated on the Fourth and Sixth Frontier Wars while largely ignoring the critical years in between. In the case of the latter conflict, this can be seen as a preoccupation with the Great Trek and its causes. Historians have also

failed adequately to address the manner in which Xhosa-colonial relations and ongoing strife among the chiefdoms interacted during this critical decade to shape attitudes towards Europeans. In particular, by viewing the Fourth Frontier War as the defining moment in Xhosa-European relations, they have not recognized that even after that conflict, the chiefs remained more concerned about competition with one another than they did about white encroachment. It was only after the Kat River Conference in 1817 that most Xhosa came to see the relationship between Ngqika and the Colony as a grave threat to their political autonomy. This realization did not mature immediately. Rather, it evolved gradually and at different rates among the various chiefdoms. The Gcaleka and, obviously, the Ngqika, were the last to fully recognize the threat. It therefore becomes clear that 1819, rather than 1812, was the point at which Xhosa perceptions of the European threat finally "crystallized."

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION: THE HARDENING OF XHOSA RESISTANCE

Bitterness and War, 1820-1834

Governor Somerset's policies remained unchanged after the Fifth Frontier War. The Reprisal System continued, as did colonial recognition of Ngqika's "supremacy."¹ Needless to say, the chiefs were deeply dissatisfied with these arrangements. Even Ngqika and his sons realized that they could no longer think or act independently of the Colony. Tensions remained high after 1819, as the increasingly impoverished western chiefdoms took desperate steps to maintain their cattle and access to land. Raids on the Colony increased dramatically in the early 1820s.² Not surprisingly, conflict among the Xhosa polities dropped off drastically after Amalinde, as they finally realized what sort of a threat the Europeans posed.

The arrival of over 3,000 English colonists in 1820, and their settlement in the Zuurveld, provided the Xhosa with further evidence that the Europeans had an endless appetite for land. Their fears were realized as the settlers turned to sheep farming, an activity that required

¹ Somerset to Willshire, 17 Oct 1819, RCC, 12:346.

² Somerset to Bathurst, 23 Nov 1821, RCC, 14:209-211.

extensive grazing land. By 1830, many colonists had begun to demand that the Neutral Territory be opened up to white settlement. Land hunger, always a source of friction on the frontier, thus became acute. Ironically, the 1820 settlers, who were supposed to stabilize the frontier, instead became a key source of instability and war as they demanded further expropriations from the already-impooverished Xhosa.³

In 1822 Somerset, angered at the increase in raiding brought about by bitterness and drought, ordered a commando to capture and hold hostage his "friend" Ngqika, until his son Maqoma returned a number of cattle that he had taken from the Chumie mission station.⁴ Ngqika narrowly escaped capture, and in a pathetic retort to the Governor, spoke at length about "the natural right which he had to do with his own people, and in his own country, according to his pleasure, without the interference of a foreign power. . . ."⁵ Yet even he must have realized clearly by now that Xhosa political independence was a thing of the past. No longer could the chiefs act in any capacity without risking the immediate intervention of the Cape Colony. Although the cattle were returned, the sons of Ngqika learned another

³ Elizabeth A. Eldredge, "The Cape Colony: Economic Influence on the Eastern Frontier, 1835-1847" (M.A. Thesis, Northwestern University, 1978), 23.

⁴ Somerset to Bathurst, 23 Nov 1821, RCC, 14:209-211; Somerset to Lt. Colonel Scott, 14 Feb 1822, RCC, 14:291.

⁵ Rev. W. R. Thomson to Colonial Secretary, 23 Feb 1822, RCC, 14:298-299.

lesson about the nature of colonial politics. Further, a wave of cattle raiding resulted in further Reprisals that kept the frontier severely unsettled. Commandos in 1823 and 1826 took thousands of cattle, most of which never found their way back to the already-impooverished chiefdoms.

In 1829, Maqoma and his people were expelled from the Kat River area, in which they had resided conditionally since the 1819 treaty. Expulsion occurred because, according to colonial authorities, Maqoma had attacked a small Thembu chiefdom under the Colony's protection. Maqoma, however, maintained that because the Thembu had come to him seeking refuge from the turmoil of the Mfecane, he had the right to treat them as his subjects. Once again, British involvement in Xhosa internal politics raised tensions.⁶

The commando seized hundreds of cattle and drove Maqoma's followers from their lands in the midst of a severe drought. Maqoma responded with cattle raids and, more importantly, a dialogue with the other chiefs to convince them that war was the only means of redress for the wrongs all Xhosa had suffered. He argued that the expulsion was a "prelude to other measures, which would not only endanger their independence, but lead to a complete subjugation of

⁶ J. B. Peires, The House of Phalo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 89-90.

their country."⁷ The expulsion may thus be seen as the point at which another war with the Colony became inevitable.⁸ Indeed, the Mdange chief Bhotomane stated after the Sixth Frontier War (1834-1835) that "Macomo's heart was very sore about the land; the subject always set him on fire; he fought in hopes of getting it back."⁹

Overcrowding also contributed to Xhosa bitterness after 1819. Although no good figures exist, several eyewitnesses claimed that the Xhosa were packed into an area far too small to support their land use patterns.¹⁰ Resource scarcity spurred the development of a class of landless Xhosa wage laborers, who migrated to the Colony either periodically or permanently in order to find work. Although not widespread before 1835, migrant labor became an increasingly important means of Xhosa subsistence after 1819, underscoring the erosion of their economic independence.¹¹

Robbed of their lands and cattle, unable to conduct political affairs without colonial interference, and increasingly dependent economically upon the Colony, the western chiefdoms finally acted on the realization, which

⁷ Quoted in Peires, Phalo, 91.

⁸ Evidence of Rev. W. Shaw, ABCO, 54-55.

⁹ Quoted in Peires, Phalo, 91.

¹⁰ Evidence of Rev. W. Shaw, ABCO, 58; Peires, Phalo, 105-106, 162-163.

¹¹ Peires, Phalo, 104-106.

had first become clear in 1819, that their independence was slipping away. The Sixth Frontier War (1834-5), the largest such conflict to date, was the Xhosa response to increasing colonial control over every aspect of their lives. Although the Xhosa were ultimately defeated, two things are remarkable about the conflict: it was the only one of the nine frontier wars that was deliberately commenced by the Xhosa, and it was the war in which the greatest unity existed against the whites. Only the Gqunukhwebe remained neutral; all the other chiefdoms joined Maqoma in his campaign.¹²

There is no room here for an account of the later frontier wars or events after 1834. They are beyond the scope of the present work, which seeks only to trace the process by which Xhosa-European and Xhosa internal relations interacted to produce a firm awareness among all Xhosa of the danger posed by the Cape Colony. That process was complete by 1819, and the Xhosa reaction occurred in 1834.

A Brief Recapitulation

When Xhosa and European first settled next to one another in the Fish-Sundays region, conflict was by no means the dominant form of interaction. This was the result of several factors, including the nearly nonexistent authority of the colonial government, the abundance of resources and a certain affinity of interests among trekboers and Xhosa.

¹² Peires, Phalo, 145-146.

Because no strong authority existed in the frontier zone until 1806, conflict did not occur strictly along racial lines. The trekboers, who themselves were no more powerful than any single Xhosa chiefdom, were quick to ally with chiefs such as Rharhabe and Ndlambe in order to chastise the smaller Xhosa polities, all of which were eventually seen by the Boers as competitors for increasingly scarce resources. Rharhabe and Ndlambe were willing to ally with the trekboers in order to defeat the minor polities and thereby incorporate more cattle and commoners into their own chiefdoms.

During this early period, therefore, it is both improper and irrelevant to talk about colonial-Xhosa or white-black dichotomies. Trade and labor were nearly as important as warfare in determining the tone of frontier relations before 1793. Further, until the Third Frontier War (1793), competition for resources was not the primary concern of either Xhosa or settler. In fact, early conflicts resulted more from the destabilization caused by conflicts among the chiefdoms than from shortages of pasture and water, which by all accounts did not become general until the 1790s.

The second period of British rule, beginning in 1806, brought dramatic changes to the frontier zone. The British government was the first with the will and the resources to close the frontier and expel the Xhosa over the Fish River. Further, imperial officials viewed the Cape as a strategic asset, the halfway point to India, and a possession to be

held at all costs. Thus, tedious as issues such as stability on the frontier must have been to high-ranking British officials, the imperial government was determined to maintain the Colony. This determination to hold the Cape Colony prompted British officials to adopt a strict policy of non-intercourse with the Xhosa chiefdoms, leading directly to the 1812 expulsions. In this sense, colonial policies created irreconcilable differences between Xhosa and Briton.

The period after 1806 must be viewed in this light, but it is also important to note that the Xhosa reaction to English rule was neither instantaneous nor uniform. Various chiefdoms reacted differently to British policies, and most remained more concerned about internal conflict. While many chiefs viewed the British as a serious threat after 1812, few viewed them as the most serious threat. Rather, the period between 1812 and 1819 saw the Xhosa chiefdoms engaged in the most violent internal conflict in their history. Although this strife was due largely to British actions, it is unlikely that all Xhosa, and in particular the Gcaleka and Ngqika, made an immediate and firm connection between internal stresses and European encroachment.

The lack of attention previously directed to relations among the Xhosa chiefdoms during this period is one key weakness that this work has attempted to redress. While Xhosa politics after 1812 were profoundly influenced by European actions, they nevertheless retained an importance

and logic largely independent of the colonial threat. Conflicts among chiefdoms often predated contact with the Boers as well as the British, and must be analyzed in light of this fact. Ndlambe and Ngqika were, after all, bitter foes long before the second period of British rule at the Cape.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that, after 1812, Xhosa internal relations were never again free from British influence. Indeed, English involvement in Xhosa political affairs increased steadily after the Fourth Frontier War. It has been a key object of this thesis to demonstrate how that European presence played itself out in conflicts among the Xhosa chiefdoms and how, in turn, Xhosa internal relationships interacted with external pressures to create an awareness that the Cape Colony posed the most serious threat in memory to Xhosa political and cultural autonomy.

In 1831, Andries Stockenstrom met with Xhosa leaders about the continuing unrest along the frontier. He recorded the statement of one bitter chief, who eloquently summarized the feelings that virtually all Xhosa had for the British by this time. "Peace," he said, "can be maintained, if you will only leave us what we have left. But we know that the white man will not let us sit still, as long as we have a foot of land or a fat cow."¹³ Tragically, these fears about the Cape Colony were well founded.

¹³ Andries Stockenstrom, The Autobiography of the Late Sir Andries Stockenstrom, ed. C. W. Hutton, 2 vols. (Cape Town: Juta, 1887), 1:399.

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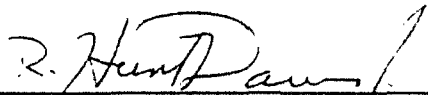
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

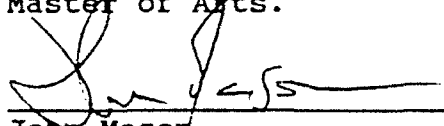
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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.




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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.



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This thesis was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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